

ROBERT BROWNING'S
POETICAL WORKS

VOL. I.

THE POETICAL WORKS

ROBERT BROWNING

VOL. I.

PAULINE—SORDELLO

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I DEDICATE THESE VOLUMES TO MY OLD FRIEND JOHN
FORSTER, GLAD AND GRATEFUL THAT HE WHO, FROM THE
FIRST PUBLICATION OF THE VARIOUS POEMS THEY INCLUDE,
HAS BEEN THEIR PROMPTTEST AND STAUNCHEST HELPER,
SHOULD SEEM EVEN NEARER TO ME NOW THAN ALMOST
THIRTY YEARS AGO

R. B.

LONDON *April* 21, 1863.

THE poems that follow are printed in the order of their publication. The first piece in the series I acknowledge and retain with extreme repugnance, indeed purely of necessity; for not long ago I inspected one, and am certified of the existence of other transcripts, intended sooner or later to be published abroad: by forestalling these, I can at least correct some misprints (no syllable is changed) and introduce a boyish work by an exculpatory word. The thing was my earliest attempt at "poetry always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine," which I have since written according to a scheme less extravagant and scale less impracticable than were ventured upon in this crude preliminary sketch—a sketch that, on reviewal, appears not altogether wide of some hint of the characteristic features of that particular *dramatis persona* it would fain have reproduced: good draughtsmanship, however, and right handling were far beyond the artist at that time.

R. B.

LONDON : December 25, 1867.

I preserve, in order to supplement it, the foregoing preface. I had thought, when compelled to include in

my collected works the poem to which it refers, that the honest course would be to reprint, and leave mere literary errors unaltered. Twenty years' endurance of an eyesore seems more than sufficient: my faults remain duly recorded against me, and I claim permission to somewhat diminish these, so far as style is concerned, in the present and final edition where "Pauline" must needs, first of my performances, confront the reader. I have simply removed solecisms, mended the metre a little, and endeavoured to strengthen the phraseology—experience helping, in some degree, the helplessness of juvenile haste and heat in their untried adventure long ago.

The poems that follow are again, as before, printed in chronological order; but only so far as proves compatible with the prescribed size of each volume, which necessitates an occasional change in the distribution of its contents. Every date is subjoined as before.

R. B.

LONDON : *February 27, 1888.*

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PAULINE;
A FRAGMENT OF A CONFESSION.

Plus ne suis ce que j'ai été,
Et ne le sçaurois jamais être.—MAROT.

NON dubito, quoniam titulus libri nostri raritate sua quamplurimos alliciat ad legendum. inter quos nonnulli oblique opinionis, mente languidi, multi etiam maligni, et in ingenium nostrum ingrati accedent, qui temeraria sua ignorantia, vix conspecto titulo clamabunt Nos vetita docere, hæresium semina jacere. piis auribus offendiculo, præclaris ingeniis scandalo esse: . . . adeo conscientiae suae consulentes, ut nec Apollo, nec Musæ omnes, neque Angelus de cælo me ab illorum execratione vindicare queant: quibus et ego nunc consulo, ne scripta nostra legant, nec intelligant, nec meminerint: nam noxia sunt, venenosa sunt: Acherontis ostium est in hoc libro, lapides loquitur, caveant, ne cerebrum illis excutiat. Vos autem, qui æqua mente ad legendum venitis, si tantam prudentiæ discretionem adhibueritis, quantam in melle legendo apes, jam securi legite. Puto namque vos et utilitatis haud parum et voluptatis plurimum accepturos. Quod si qua repereritis, quæ vobis non placeant, mittite illa, nec utimini. NAM ET EGO VOBIS ILLA NON PROBO, SED NARRO. Cætera tamen propterea non respuite . . . Ideo, si quid liberius dictum sit, ignoscite adolescenti nostræ, qui minor quam adolescens hoc opus composui.—*Hen. Corn. Agrippa, De Occult. Philosoph. in Præfat.*

LONDON: *January* 1833.
V. A. XX.

[This introduction would appear less absurdly pretentious did it apply, as was intended, to a completed structure of which the poem was meant for only a beginning and remains a fragment.]

PAULINE.

1833.

PAULINE, mine own, bend o'er me—thy soft breast
Shall pant to mine—bend o'er me—thy sweet eyes,
And loosened hair and breathing lips, and arms
Drawing me to thee—these build up a screen
To shut me in with thee, and from all fear ;
So that I might unlock the sleepless brood
Of fancies from my soul, their lurking-place,
Nor doubt that each would pass, ne'er to return
To one so watched, so loved and so secured.
But what can guard thee but thy naked love ?
Ah dearest, whoso sucks a poisoned wound
Envenoms his own veins ! Thou art so good,
So calm—if thou shouldst wear a brow less light
For some wild thought which, but for me, were kept
From out thy soul as from a sacred star !
Yet till I have unlocked them it were vain
To hope to sing ; some woe would light on me ;

Nature would point at one whose quivering lip
Was bathed in her enchantments, whose brow burned
Beneath the crown to which her secrets knelt,
Who learned the spell which can call up the dead,
And then departed smiling like a fiend
Who has deceived God,—if such one should seek
Again her altars and stand robed and crowned
Amid the faithful ! Sad confession first,
Remorse and pardon and old claims renewed,
Ere I can be—as I shall be no more.

I had been spared this shame if I had sat
By thee for ever from the first, in place
Of my wild dreams of beauty and of good,
Or with them, as an earnest of their truth :
No thought nor hope having been shut from thee,
No vague wish unexplained, no wandering aim
Sent back to bind on fancy's wings and seek
Some strange fair world where it might be a law ;
But, doubting nothing, had been led by thee,
Thro' youth, and saved, as one at length awaked
Who has slept through a peril. Ah vain, vain !

Thou lovest me ; the past is in its grave
Tho' its ghost haunts us ; still this much is ours,
To cast away restraint, lest a worse thing

Wait for us in the dark. Thou lovest me ;
And thou art to receive not love but faith,
For which thou wilt be mine, and smile and take
All shapes and shames, and veil without a fear
That form which music follows like a slave :
And I look to thee and I trust in thee,
As in a Northern night one looks alway
Unto the East for morn and spring and joy.
Thou seest then my aimless, hopeless state,
And, resting on some few old feelings won
Back by thy beauty, wouldst that I essay
The task which was to me what now thou art :
And why should I conceal one weakness more?

Thou wilt remember one warm morn when winter
Crept aged from the earth, and spring's first breath
Blew soft from the moist hills ; the black-thorn boughs,
So dark in the bare wood, when glistening
In the sunshine were white with coming buds,
Like the bright side of a sorrow, and the banks
Had violets opening from sleep like eyes.
I walked with thee who knew'st not a deep shame
Lurked beneath smiles and careless words which sought
To hide it till they wandered and were mute,
As we stood listening on a sunny mound
To the wind murmuring in the damp copse,

Like heavy breathings of some hidden thing
Betrayed by sleep ; until the feeling rushed
That I was low indeed, yet not so low
As to endure the calmness of thine eyes.
And so I told thee all, while the cool breast
I leaned on altered not its quiet beating :
And long ere words like a hurt bird's complaint
Bade me look up and be what I had been,
I felt despair could never live by thee :
Thou wilt remember. Thou art not more dear
Than song was once to me ; and I ne'er sung
But as one entering bright halls where all
Will rise and shout for him : sure I must own
That I am fallen, having chosen gifts
Distinct from theirs—that I am sad and fain
Would give up all to be but where I was,
Not high as I had been if faithful found,
But low and weak yet full of hope, and sure
Of goodness as of life—that I would lose
All this gay mastery of mind, to sit
Once more with them, trusting in truth and love
And with an aim—not being what I am.

Oh Pauline, I am ruined who believed
That though my soul had floated from its sphere
Of wild dominion into the dim orb

Of self—that it was strong and free as ever !
It has conformed itself to that dim orb,
Reflecting all its shades and shapes, and now
Must stay where it alone can be adored.
I have felt this in dreams—in dreams in which
I seemed the fate from which I fled ; I felt
A strange delight in causing my decay.
I was a fiend in darkness chained for ever
Within some ocean-cave ; and ages rolled,
Till through the cleft rock, like a moonbeam, came
A white swan to remain with me , and ages
Rolled, yet I tired not of my first free joy
In gazing on the peace of its pure wings :
And then I said “ It is most fair to me,
“ Yet its soft wings must sure have suffered change
“ From the thick darkness, sure its eyes are dim,
“ Its silver pinions must be cramped and numbed
“ With sleeping ages here ; it cannot leave me,
“ For it would seem, in light beside its kind,
“ Withered, tho’ here to me most beautiful.”
And then I was a young witch whose blue eyes,
As she stood naked by the river springs,
Drew down a god : I watched his radiant form
• Growing less radiant, and it gladdened me ;
Till one morn, as he sat in the sunshine
Upon my knees, singing to me of heaven,

He turned to look at me, ere I could lose
The grin with which I viewed his perishing :
And he shrieked and departed and sat long
By his deserted throne, but sunk at last
Murmuring, as I kissed his lips and curled
Around him, "I am still a god-- to thee."

Still I can lay my soul bare in its fall,
Since all the wandering and all the weakness
Will be a saddest comment on the song :
And if, that done, I can be young again,
I will give up all gained, as willingly
As one gives up a charm which shuts him out
From hope or part or care in human kind.
As life wanes, all its care and strife and toil
Seem strangely valueless, while the old trees
Which grew by our youth's home, the waving mass
Of climbing plants heavy with bloom and dew,
The morning swallows with their songs like words,
All these seem clear and only worth our thoughts :
So, aught connected with my early life,
My rude songs or my wild imaginings,
How I look on them-- most distinct amid
The fever and the stir of after years !

I ne'er had ventured e'en to hope for this,

Had not the glow I felt at His award,
Assured me all was not extinct within :
His whom all honour, whose renown springs up
Like sunlight which will visit all the world,
So that e'en they who sneered at him at first,
Come out to it, as some dark spider crawls
From his foul nets which some lit torch invades,
Yet spinning still new films for his retreat.
Thou didst smile, poet, but can we forgive?

√Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever !
Thou art gone from us ; years go by and spring
Gladdens and the young earth is beautiful,
Yet thy songs come not, other bards arise,
But none like thee : they stand, thy majesties,
Like mighty works which tell some spirit there
Hath sat regardless of neglect and scorn,
Till, its long task completed, it hath risen
And left us, never to return, and all
Rush in to peer and praise when all in vain.
The air seems bright with thy past presence yet,
But thou art still for me as thou hast been
When I have stood with thee as on a throne
√With all thy dim creations gathered round
Like mountains, and I felt of mould like them,
And with them creatures of my own were mixed,

Like things half-lived, catching and giving life.
But thou art still for me who have adored '—
Tho' single, panting but to hear thy name
Which I believed a spell to me alone,
Scarce deeming thou wast as a star to men !
As one should worship long a sacred spring '—
Scarce worth a moth's flitting, which long grasses cross,
And one small tree embowers droopingly—
Joying to see some wandering insect won
To live in its few rushes, or some locust
To pasture on its boughs, or some wild bird
Stoop for its freshness from the trackless air :
And then should find it but the fountain-head,
Long lost, of some great river washing towns
And towers, and seeing old woods which will live
But by its banks untrod of human foot,
Which, when the great sun sinks, lie quivering
In light as some thing lieth half of life
Before God's foot, waiting a wondrous change ;
Then girt with rocks which seek to turn or stay
Its course in vain, for it does ever spread
Like a sea's arm as it goes rolling on,
Being the pulse of some great country—so
Wast thou to me, and art thou to the world !
And I, perchance, half feel a strange regret
That I am not what I have been to thee :

Like a girl one has silently loved long
In her first loneliness in some retreat,
When, late emerged, all gaze and glow to view
Her fresh eyes and soft hair and lips which bloom
Like a mountain berry : doubtless it is sweet
To see her thus adored, but there have been
Moments when all the world was in our praise,
Sweeter than any pride of after hours.
Yet, sun-treader, all hail ! From my heart's heart
I bid thee hail ! E'en in my wildest dreams,
I proudly feel I would have thrown to dust
The wreaths of fame which seemed o'erhanging me,
To see thee for a moment as thou art.

And if thou livest, if thou lovest, spirit !
Remember me who set this final seal
To wandering thought—that one so pure as thou
Could never die. Remember me who flung
All honour from my soul, yet paused and said
“ There is one spark of love remaining yet,
“ For I have nought in common with him, shapes
“ Which followed him avoid me, and foul forms
“ Seek me, which ne'er could fasten on his mind ;
“ And though I feel how low I am to him,
“ Yet I aim not even to catch a tone
“ Of harmonies he called profusely up ;

“So, one gleam still remains, although the last.”
Remember me who praise thee e’en with tears,
For never more shall I walk calm with thee;
Thy sweet imaginings are as an air,
A melody some wondrous singer sings,
Which, though it haunt men oft in the still eve,
They dream not to essay; yet it no less
But more is honoured. I was thine in shame,
And now when all thy proud renown is out,
I am a watcher whose eyes have grown dim
With looking for some star which breaks on him
Altered and worn and weak and full of tears.

Autumn has come like spring returned to us,
Won from her girlishness; like one returned
A friend that was a lover, nor forgets
The first warm love, but full of sober thoughts
Of fading years; whose soft mouth quivers yet
With the old smile, but yet so changed and still!
And here am I the scoffer, who have probed
Life’s vanity, won by a word again
Into my own life—by one little word
Of this sweet friend who lives in loving me,
Lives strangely on my thoughts and looks and words,
As fathoms down some nameless ocean thing
Its silent course of quietness and joy.

O dearest, if indeed I tell the past,
May'st thou forget it as a sad sick dream !
Or if it linger—my lost soul too soon
Sinks to itself and whispers we shall be
But closer linked, two creatures whom the earth
Bears singly, with strange feelings unrevealed
Save to each other ; or two lonely things
Created by some power whose reign is done,
Having no part in God or his bright world.
I am to sing whilst ebbing day dies soft,
As a lean scholar dies worn o'er his book,
And in the heaven stars steal out one by one
As hunted men steal to their mountain watch.
I must not think, lest this new impulse die
In which I trust ; I have no confidence :
So, I will sing on fast as fancies come ;
Rudely, the verse being as the mood it paints

I strip my mind bare, whose first elements
I shall unveil—not as they struggled forth
In infancy, nor as they now exist,
When I am grown above them and can rule—
But in that middle stage when they were full
Yet ere I had disposed them to my will ;
And then I shall show how these elements
Produced my present state, and what it is.

I am made up of an intensest life,
Of a most clear idea of consciousness
Of self, distinct from all its qualities,
From all affections, passions, feelings, powers ,
And thus far it exists, if tracked, in all :
But linked, in me, to self-supremacy, 4
Existing as a centre to all things,
Most potent to create and rule and call
Upon all things to minister to it ;
And to a principle of restlessness
Which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all—
This is myself ; and I should thus have been
Though gifted lower than the meanest soul.

And of my powers, one springs up to save
From utter death a soul with such desire
Confined to clay—of powers the only one
Which marks me—an imagination which
Has been a very angel, coming not
In fitful visions but beside me ever
And never failing me ; so, though my mind
Forgets not, not a shred of life forgets,
Yet I can take a secret pride in calling
'The dark past up to quell it regally.

A mind like this must dissipate itself.

But I have always had one lode-star ; now,
As I look back, I see that I have halted
Or hastened as I looked towards that star—
A need, a trust, a yearning after God :
A feeling I have analysed but late,
But it existed, and was reconciled
With a neglect of all I deemed his laws,
Which yet, when seen in others, I abhorred.
I felt as one beloved, and so shut in
From fear : and thence I date my trust in signs
And omens, for I saw God everywhere ;
And I can only lay it to the fruit
Of a sad after-time that I could doubt
Even his being—e'en the while I felt
His presence, never acted from myself,
Still trusted in a hand to lead me through
All danger ; and this feeling ever fought
Against my weakest reason and resolve.

And I can love nothing—and this dull truth
Has come the last : but sense supplies a love
Encircling me and mingling with my life.

These make myself : I have long sought in vain
To trace how they were formed by circumstance,
Yet ever found them mould my wildest youth

Where they alone displayed themselves, converted
All objects to their use : now see their course !

They came to me in my first dawn of life
Which passed alone with wisest ancient books
All halo-girt with fancies of my own ;
And I myself went with the tale—a god
Wandering after beauty, or a giant
Standing vast in the sunset—an old hunter
Talking with gods, or a high-crested chief
Sailing with troops of friends to Tenedos.
I tell you, nought has ever been so clear
As the place, the time, the fashion of those lives :
I had not seen a work of lofty art,
Nor woman's beauty nor sweet nature's face,
Yet, I say, never morn broke clear as those
On the dim clustered isles in the blue sea,
The deep groves and white temples and wet caves
And nothing ever will surprise me now—
Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed,
Who bound my forehead with Proserpine's hair.

And strange it is that I who could so dream
Should e'er have stooped to aim at aught beneath—
Aught low or painful ; but I never doubted :
So, as I grew. I rudely shaped my life

To my immediate wants ; yet strong beneath
Was a vague sense of power though folded up—
A sense that, though those shades and times were past,
Their spirit dwelt in me, with them should rule.

Then came a pause, and long restraint chained down
My soul till it was changed. I lost myself,
And were it not that I so loathe that loss,
I could recall how first I learned to turn
My mind against itself ; and the effects
In deeds for which remorse were vain as for
The wanderings of delirious dream ; yet thence
Came cunning, envy, falsehood, all world's wrong
That spotted me : at length I cleansed my soul.
Yet long world's influence remained ; and nought
But the still life I led, apart once more,
Which left me free to seek soul's old delights,
Could e'er have brought me thus far back to peace.

As peace returned, I sought out some pursuit ;
And song rose, no new impulse but the one
With which all others best could be combined.
My life has not been that of those whose heaven
Was lampless save where poesy shone out ;
But as a clime where glittering mountain-tops
And glancing sea and forests steeped in light

Give back reflected the far-flashing sun ;
For music (which is earnest of a heaven,
Seeing we know emotions strange by it,
Not else to be revealed,) is like a voice,
A low voice calling fancy, as a friend,
To the green woods in the gay summer time :
And she fills all the way with dancing shapes
Which have made painters pale, and they go on
Till stars look at them and winds call to them
As they leave life's path for the twilight world
Where the dead gather. This was not at first,
For I scarce knew what I would do. I had
An impulse but no yearning—only sang.

And first I sang as I in dream have seen
Music wait on a lyrist for some thought,
Yet singing to herself until it came.
I turned to those old times and scenes where all
That's beautiful had birth for me, and made
Rude verses on them all ; and then I paused—
I had done nothing, so I sought to know
What other minds achieved. No fear outbroke
As on the works of mighty bards I gazed,
In the first joy at finding my own thoughts
Recorded, my own fancies justified,
And their aspirings but my very own.

With them I first explored passion and mind,—
All to begin afresh ! I rather sought
To rival what I wondered at than form
Creations of my own ; if much was light
Lent by the others, much was yet my own.

I paused again : 'a change was coming—came :
I was no more a boy, the past was breaking
Before the future and like fever worked.
I thought on my new self, and all my powers
Burst out. I dreamed not of restraint, but gazed
On all things : schemes and systems went and came,
And I was proud (being vainest of the weak)
In wandering o'er thought's world to seek some one
To be my prize, as if you wandered o'er
The White Way for a star.

And my choice fell
Not so much on a system as a man—
On one, whom praise of mine shall not offend,
Who was as calm as beauty, being such
Unto mankind as thou to me, Pauline,—
Believing in them and devoting all
His soul's strength to their winning back to peace ;
Who sent forth hopes and longings for their sake,
Clothed in all passion's melodies : such first

Caught me and set me, slave of a sweet task,
To disentangle, gather sense from song :
Since, song-inwoven, lurked there words which seemed
A key to a new world, the muttering
Of angels, something yet unguessed by man.
How my heart leapt as still I sought and found
Much there, I felt my own soul had conceived,
But there living and burning ! Soon the orb
Of his conceptions dawned on me ; its praise
Lives in the tongues of men, men's brows are high
When his name means a triumph and a pride,
So, my weak voice may well forbear to shame
What seemed decreed my fate : I threw myself
To meet it, I was vowed to liberty,
Men were to be as gods and earth as heaven,
And I—ah, what a life was mine to prove !
My whole soul rose to meet it. Now, Pauline,
I shall go mad, if I recall that time !

Oh let me look back ere I leave for ever
The time which was an hour one fondly waits
For a fair girl that comes a withered hag !
And I was lonely, far from woods and fields,
And amid dullest sights, who should be loose
As a stag ; yet I was full of bliss, who lived
With Plato and who had the key to life ;

And I had dimly shaped my first attempt,
And many a thought did I build up on thought,
As the wild bee hangs cell to cell ; in vain,
For I must still advance, no rest for mind.

'Twas in my plan to look on real life,
The life all new to me ; my theories
Were firm, so then I left, to look and learn
Mankind, its cares, hopes, fears, its woes and joys ;
And, as I pondered on their ways, I sought
How best life's end might be attained—an end
Comprising every joy. I deeply mused.

And suddenly without heart-wreck I awoke
As from a dream : I said " 'Twas beautiful,
"Yet but a dream, and so adieu to it !"
As some world-wanderer sees in a far meadow
Strange towers and high-walled gardens thick with trees,
Where song takes shelter and delicious mirth
From laughing fairy creatures peeping over,
And on the morrow when he comes to lie
For ever 'neath those garden-trees fruit-flushed
Sung round by fairies, all his search is vain.
First went my hopes of perfecting mankind,
Next—faith in them, and then in freedom's self
And virtue's self, then my own motives, ends

And aims and loves, and human love went last.
I felt this no decay, because new powers
Rose as old feelings left—wit, mockery,
Light-heartedness ; for I had oft been sad,
Mistrusting my resolves, but now I cast
Hope joyously away : I laughed and said
“No more of this !” I must not think : at length
I looked again to see if all went well.

My powers were greater : as some temple seemed
My soul, where nought is changed and incense rolls
Around the altar, only God is gone
And some dark spirit sitteth in his seat.
So, I passed through the temple and to me
Knelt troops of shadows, and they cried “Hail, king!
“We serve thee now and thou shalt serve no more !
“Call on us, prove us, let us worship thee !”
And I said “Are ye strong ? Let fancy bear me
“Far from the past !” And I was borne away,
As Arab birds float sleeping in the wind,
O'er deserts, towers and forests, I being calm.
And I said “I have nursed up energies,
“They will prey on me.” And a band knelt low
And cried “Lord, we are here and we will make
“Safe way for thee in thine appointed life !
“But look on us !” And I said “Ye will worship

“Me ; should my heart not worship too?” They shouted
“Thyself, thou’ art our king !” So, I stood there
Smiling—on, vanity of vanities !
For buoyant and rejoicing was the spirit
With which I looked out how to end my course ;
I felt once more myself, my powers—all mine ;
I knew while youth and health so lifted me
That, spite of all life’s nothingness, no grief
Came nigh me, I must ever be light-hearted ;
And that this knowledge was the only veil
Betwixt joy and despair : so, if age came,
I should be left—a wreck linked to a soul
Yet fluttering, or mind-broken and aware
Of my decay. So a long summer morn
Found me ; and ere noon came, I had resolved
No age should come on me ere youth was spent,
For I would wear myself out, like that morn
Which wasted not a sunbeam ; every hour
I would make mine, and die.

And thus I sought
To chain my spirit down which erst I freed
For flights to fame : I said “The troubled life
“Of genius, seen so gay when working forth
“Some trusted end, grows sad when all proves vain—
“How sad when men have parted with truth’s peace

“For falsest fancy’s sake, which waited first
“As an obedient spirit when delight
“Came without fancy’s call : but alters soon,
“Comes darkened, seldom, hastens to depart,
“Leaving a heavy darkness and warm tears.
“But I shall never lose her ; she will live
“Dearer for such seclusion. I but catch
“A hue, a glance of what I sing : so, pain
“Is linked with pleasure, for I ne’er may tell
“Half the bright sights which dazzle me ; but now
“Mine shall be all the radiance : let them fade
“Untold—others shall rise as fair, as fast !
“And when all’s done, the few dim gleams transferred,”—
(For a new thought sprang up how well it were,
Discarding shadowy hope, to weave such lays
As straight encircle men with praise and love,
So, I should not die utterly,—should bring
One branch from the gold forest, like the knight
Of old tales, witnessing I had been there)—
“And when all’s done, how vain seems e’en success—
“The vaunted influence poets have o’er men !
“’T is a fine thing that one weak as myself
“Should sit in his lone room, knowing the words
“He utters in his solitude shall move
“Men like a swift wind—that tho’ dead and gone,
“New eyes shall glisten when his beauteous dreams

“Of love comè true in happier frames than his.
“Ay, the still night brings thoughts like these, but morn
“Comes and the mockery again laughs out
“At hollow praises, smiles allied to sneers ;
“And my soul’s idol ever whispers me
“To dwell with him and his unhonoured song :
“And I foreknow my spirit, that would press
“First in the struggle, fail again to make
“All bow enslaved, and I again should sink.

“And then know that this curse will come on us,
“To see our idols perish ; we may wither,
“No marvel, we are clay, but our low fate
“Should not extend to those whom trustingly
“We sent before into time’s yawning gulf
“To face what dread may lurk in darkness there.
“To find the painter’s glory pass, and feel
“Music can move us not as once, or, worst,
“To weep decaying wits ere the frail body
“Decays ! Nought makes me trust some love is true,
“But the delight of the contented lowness
“With which I gaze on him I keep for ever
“Above me ; I to rise and rival him?
“Feed his fame rather from my heart’s best blood,
“Wither unseen that he may flourish still.”

Pauline, my soul's friend, thou dost pity yet
How this mood swayed me when that soul found thine,
When I had set myself to live this life,
Defying all past glory. Ere thou camest
I seemed defiant, sweet, for old delights
Had flocked like birds again ; music, my life,
Nourished me more than ever ; then the lore
Loved for itself and all it shows—that king
Treading the purple calmly to his death,
While round him, like the clouds of eve, all dusk,
The giant shades of fate, silently flitting,
Pile the dim outline of the coming doom ;
And him sitting alone in blood while friends
Are hunting far in the sunshine ; and the boy
With his white breast and brow and clustering curls
Streaked with his mother's blood, but striving hard
To tell his story ere his reason goes.
And when I loved thee as love seemed so oft,
Thou lovedst me indeed : I wondering searched
My heart to find some feeling like such love,
Believing I was still much I had been.
Too soon I found all faith had gone from me,
And the late glow of life, like change on clouds,
Proved not the morn-blush widening into day,
But eve faint-coloured by the dying sun
While darkness hastens quickly. I will tell

My state as though 'twere none of mine—despair
Cannot come near us—this it is, my state.

•

Souls alter not, and mine must still advance ;
Strange that I knew not, when I flung away
My youth's chief aims, their loss might lead to loss
Of what few I retained, and no resource
Be left me : for behold how changed is all !
I cannot chain my soul : it will not rest
In its clay prison, this most narrow sphere :
It has strange impulse, tendency, desire,
Which nowise I account for nor explain,
But cannot stifle, being bound to trust
All feelings equally, to hear all sides :
How can my life indulge them? yet they live,
Referring to some state of life unknown.

My selfishness is satiated not,
It wears me like a flame ; my hunger for
All pleasure, howsoe'er minute, grows pain ;
I envy—how I envy him whose soul
Turns its whole energies to some one end,
To elevate an aim, pursue success
However mean ! So, my still baffled hope
Seeks out abstractions ; I would have one joy,
But one in life, so it were wholly mine,

One rapture all my soul could fill : and this
Wild feeling places me in dream afar
In some vast country where the eye can see[^]
No end to the far hills and dales bestrewn
With shining towers and towns, till I grow mad
Well-nigh, to know not one abode but holds
Some pleasure, while my soul could grasp the world,
But must remain this vile form's slave. I look
With hope to age at last, which quenching much,
May let me concentrate what sparks it spares.

This restlessness of passion meets in me
A craving after knowledge : the sole proof
Of yet commanding will is in that power
Repressed ; for I beheld it in its dawn,
The sleepless harpy with just-budding wings,
And I considered whether to forego
All happy ignorant hopes and fears, to live,
Finding a recompense in its wild eyes.
And when I found that I should perish so,
I bade its wild eyes close from me for ever,
And I am left alone with old delights ;
See ! it lies in me a chained thing, still prompt
To serve me if I loose its slightest bond :
I cannot but be proud of my bright slave.

How should this earth's life prove my only sphere?
Can I in so narrow sense but that in life
Soul still exceeds it? In their elements
My love outsoars my reason ; but since love
Perforce receives its object from this earth
While reason wanders chainless, the few truths
Caught from its wanderings have sufficed to quell
Love chained below ; then what were love, set free,
Which, with the object it demands, would pass
Reason companioning the seraphim?
No, what I feel may pass all human love
Yet fall far short of what my love should be.
And yet I seem more warped in this than aught,
Myself stands out more hideously : of old
I could forget myself in friendship, fame,
Liberty, nay, in love of mightier souls ;
But I begin to know what thing hate is—
To sicken and to quiver and grow white—
And I myself have furnished its first prey.
Hate of the weak and ever-wavering will,
The selfishness, the still-decaying frame . . .
But I must never grieve whom wing can waft
Far from such thoughts—as now. Andromeda !
And she is with me : years roll, I shall change,
But change can touch her not—so beautiful
With her fixed eyes, earnest and still, and hair

Lifted and spread by the salt-sweeping breeze,
And one red beam, all the storm leaves in heaven,
Resting upon her eyes and hair, such hair,
As she awaits the snake on the wet beach
By the dark rock and the white wave just breaking
At her feet ; quite naked and alone ; nothing
I doubt not, nor fear for, secure some god
To save will come in thunder from the stars.
Let it pass ! Soul requires another change.
I will be gifted with a wondrous mind,
Yet sunk by error to men's sympathy,
And in the wane of life, yet only so
As to call up their fears ; and there shall come
A time requiring youth's best energies ;
And lo, I fling age, sorrow, sickness off,
And rise triumphant, triumph through decay.

And thus it is that I supply the chasm
'Twixt what I am and all I fain would be :
But then to know nothing, to hope for nothing,
To seize on life's dull joys from a strange fear
Lest, losing them, all 's lost and nought remains !

There 's some vile juggle with my reason here ;
I feel I but explain to my own loss
These impulses : they live no less the same.

Liberty ! what though I despair? my blood
Rose never at a slave's name proud as now.
Oh sympathies, obscured by sophistries !—
Why else have I sought refuge in myself,
But from the woes I saw and could not stay?
Love ! is not this to love thee, my Pauline?
I cherish prejudice, lest I be left
Utterly loveless? witness my belief
In poets, though sad change has come there too ;
No more I leave myself to follow them—
Unconsciously I measure me by them—
Let me forget it : and I cherish most
My love of England—how her name, a word
Of hers in a strange tongue makes my heart beat !

Pauline, could I but break the spell ! Not now—
All's fever—but when calm shall come again,
I am prepared : I have made life my own.
I would not be content with all the change
One frame should feel, but I have gone in thought
Thro' all conjuncture, I have lived all life
When it is most alive, where strangest fate
New-shapes it past surmise—the throes of men
Bit by some curse or in the grasps of doom
Half-visible and still-increasing round,
Or crowning their wide being's general aim.

These are wild fancies, but I feel, sweet friend,
As one breathing his weakness to the ear,
Of pitying angel—dear as a winter flower,
A slight flower growing alone, and offering
Its frail cup of three leaves to the cold sun,
Yet joyous and confiding like the triumph
Of a child : and why am I not worthy thee?
I can live all the life of plants, and gaze
Drowsily on the bees that flit and play,
Or bare my breast for sunbeams which will kill,
Or open in the night of sounds, to look
For the dim stars ; I can mount with the bird
Leaping airily his pyramid of leaves
And twisted boughs of some tall mountain tree,
Or rise cheerfully springing to the heavens ;
Or like a fish breathe deep the morning air
In the misty sun-warm water ; or with flower
And tree can smile in light at the sinking sun
Just as the storm comes, as a girl would look
On a departing lover—most serene.

Pauline, come with me, see how I could build
A home for us, out of the world, in thought !
I am uplifted : fly with me, Pauline !

Night, and one single ridge of narrow path

Between the sullen river and the woods
Waving and muttering, for the moonless night
Has shaped them into images of life,
Like the uprising of the giant-ghosts,
Looking on earth to know how their sons fare :
Thou art so close by me, the roughest swell
Of wind in the tree-tops hides not the panting
Of thy soft breasts. No, we will pass to morning—
Morning, the rocks and valleys and old woods.
How the sun brightens in the mist, and here,
Half in the air, like creatures of the place,
Trusting the element, living on high boughs
That swing in the wind—look at the silver spray
Flung from the foam-sheet of the cataract
Amid the broken rocks! Shall we stay here
With the wild hawks? No, ere the hot noon come,
Dive we down—safe! See this our new retreat
Walled in with a sloped mound of matted shrubs,
Dark, tangled, old and green, still sloping down
To a small pool whose waters lie asleep
Amid the trailing boughs turned water-plants :
And tall trees overarch to keep us in,
Breaking the sunbeams into emerald shafts,
And in the dreamy water one small group
Of two or three strange trees are got together
Wondering at all around, as strange beasts herd

Together far from their own land : all wildness,
No turf nor moss, for boughs and plants pave all,
And tongues of bank go shelving in the lymph,
Where the pale-throated snake reclines his head,
And old grey stones lie making eddies there,
The wild-mice cross them dry-shod. Deeper in !
Shut thy soft eyes—now look—still deeper in !
This is the very heart of the woods all round
Mountain-like heaped above us ; yet even here
One pond of water gleams ; far off the river
Sweeps like a sea, barred out from land ; but one—
One thin clear sheet has overleaped and wound
Into this silent depth, which gained, it lies
Still, as but let by sufferance ; the trees bend
O'er it as wild men watch a sleeping girl,
And through their roots long creeping plants out-stretch
Their twined hair, steeped and sparkling ; farther on,
Tall rushes and thick flag-knots have combined
To narrow it ; so, at length, a silver thread,
It winds, all noiselessly through the deep wood
Till thro' a cleft-way, thro' the moss and stone,
It joins its parent-river with a shout.

Up for the glowing day, leave the old woods !
See, they part, like a ruined arch : the sky !
Nothing but sky appears, so close the roots

And grass of the hill-top level with the air—
Blue sunny air, where a great cloud floats laden
With light, like a dead whale that white birds pick,
Floating away in the sun in some north sea.
Air, air, fresh life-blood, thin and searching air,
The clear, dead breath of God that loveth us,
Where small birds reel and winds take their delight !
Water is beautiful, but not like air :
See, where the solid azure waters lie
Made as of thickened air, and down below,
The fern-ranks like a forest spread themselves
As though each pore could feel the element ;
Where the quick glancing serpent winds his way,
Float with me there, Pauline !—but not like air.

Down the hill ! Stop—a clump of trees, see, set
On a heap of rock, which look o'er the far plain :
So, envious climbing shrubs would mount to rest
And peer from their spread boughs ; wide they wave,
 looking
At the muleteers who whistle on their way,
To the merry chime of morning bells, past all
The little smoking cots, mid fields and banks
And copses bright in the sun. My spirit wanders :
Hedgerows for me—those living hedgerows where
The bushes close and clasp above and keep

Thought in—I am concentrated—I feel ;
But my soul saddens when it looks beyond :
I cannot be immortal, taste all joy.

O God, where do they tend—these struggling aims ? *
What would I have ? What is this “sleep” which
seems

* Je crains bien que mon pauvre ami ne soit pas toujours parfaitement compris dans ce qui reste à lire de cet étrange fragment, mais il est moins propre que tout autre à éclaircir ce qui de sa nature ne peut jamais être que songe et confusion. D'ailleurs je ne sais trop si en cherchant à mieux co-ordonner certaines parties l'on ne courrait pas le risque de nuire au seul mérite auquel une production si singulière peut prétendre, celui de donner une idée assez précise du genre qu'elle n'a fait qu'ébaucher. Ce début sans prétention, ce remuement des passions qui va d'abord en accroissant et puis s'apaise par degrés, ces élans de l'âme, ce retour soudain sur soi-même, et par-dessus tout, la tournure d'esprit tout particulière de mon ami, rendent les changemens presque impossibles. Les raisons qu'il fait valoir ailleurs, et d'autres encore plus puissantes, ont fait trouver grâce à mes yeux pour cet écrit qu'autrement je lui eusse conseillé de jeter au feu. Je n'en crois pas moins au grand principe de toute composition—à ce principe de Shakespeare, de Raffaele, de Beethoven, d'où il suit que la concentration des idées est due bien plus à leur conception qu'à leur mise en exécution. J'ai tout lieu de craindre que la première de ces qualités ne soit encore étrangère à mon ami, et je doute fort qu'un redoublement de travail lui fasse acquérir la seconde. Le mieux serait de brûler ceci, mais que faire ?

Je crois que dans ce qui suit il fait allusion à un certain examen qu'il fit autrefois de l'âme, ou plutôt de son âme, pour découvrir la suite des objets auxquels il lui serait possible d'atteindre, et dont chacun une fois obtenu devait former une espèce de plateau d'où l'on pouvait apercevoir d'autres buts, d'autres projets, d'autres jouissances qui, à leur tour, devaient être surmontés. Il en résultait que l'oubli et le sommeil devaient tout terminer. Cette idée, que je ne saisis pas parfaitement, lui est peut-être aussi inintelligible qu'à moi.

PAULINE.

To bound all? can there be a "waking" point
Of crowning life? The soul would never rule;
It would be first in all things, it would have
Its utmost pleasure filled, but, that complete,
Commanding, for commanding, sickens it.
The last point I can trace is—rest beneath
Some better essence than itself, in weakness;
This is "myself," not what I think should be:
And what is that I hunger for but God?

My God, my God, let me for once look on thee
As though nought else existed, we alone!
And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark
Expands till I can say,—Even from myself
I need thee and I feel thee and I love thee.
I do not plead my rapture in thy works
For love of thee, nor that I feel as one
Who cannot die: but there is that in me
Which turns to thee, which loves or which should love.

Why have I girt myself with this hell-dress?
Why have I laboured to put out my life?
Is it not in my nature to adore,
And e'en for all my reason do I not
Feel him, and thank him, and pray to him—now?
Can I forego the trust that he loves me?

Do I not feel a love which only ONE . . .
O thou pale form, so dimly seen, deep-eyed !
I have denied thee calmly—do I not
Pant when I read of thy consummate power,
And burn to see thy calm pure truths out-flash
The brightest gleams of earth's philosophy ?
Do I not shake to hear aught question thee ?
If I am erring save me, madden me,
Take from me powers and pleasures, let me die
Ages, so I see thee ! I am knit round
As with a charm by sin and lust and pride,
Yet though my wandering dreams have seen all shapes
Of strange delight, oft have I stood by thee—
Have I been keeping lonely watch with thee
In the damp night by weeping Olivet,
Or leaning on thy bosom, proudly less,
Or dying with thee on the lonely cross,
Or witnessing thine outburst from the tomb.

A mortal, sin's familiar friend, doth here
Avow that he will give all earth's reward,
But to believe and humbly teach the faith,
In suffering and poverty and shame,
Only believing he is not unloved.

And now, my Pauline, I am thine for ever !

I feel the spirit which has buoyed me up
Desert me, and old shades are gathering fast ;
Yet while the last light waits, I would say much,
This chiefly, it is gain that I have said
Somewhat of love I ever felt for thee
But seldom told ; our hearts so beat together
That speech seemed mockery ; but when dark hours come,
And joy departs, and thou, sweet, deem'st it strange
A sorrow moves me, thou canst not remove,
Look on this lay I dedicate to thee,
Which through thee I began, which thus I end,
Collecting the last gleams to strive to tell
How I am thine, and more than ever now
That I sink fast : yet though I deeper sink,
No less song proves one word has brought me bliss,
Another still may win bliss surely back.
Thou knowest, dear, I could not think all calm,
For fancies followed thought and bore me off,
And left all indistinct ; ere one was caught
Another glanced ; so, dazzled by my wealth,
I knew not which to leave nor which to choose,
For all so floated, nought was fixed and firm.
And then thou said'st a perfect bard was one
Who chronicled the stages of all life,
And so thou bad'st me shadow this first stage.
'T is done, and even now I recognize

The shift, the change from last to past—discern
Faintly how life is truth and truth is good.
And why thou must be mine is, that e'en now
In the dim hush of night, that I have done,
Despite the sad forebodings, love looks through—
Whispers,—E'en at the last I have her still,
With her delicious eyes as clear as heaven
When rain in a quick shower has beat down mist,
And clouds float white above like broods of swans.
How the blood lies upon her cheek, outspread
As thinned by kisses ! only in her lips
It wells and pulses like a living thing,
And her neck looks like marble misted o'er
With love-breath,—a Pauline from heights above,
Stooping beneath me, looking up—one look
As I might kill her and be loved the more.

So, love me—me, Pauline, and nought but me,
Never leave loving ! Words are wild and weak,
Believe them not, Pauline ! I stained myself
But to behold thee purer by my side,
To show thou art my breath, my life, a last
Resource, an extreme want : never believe
Aught better could so look on thee ; nor seek
Again the world of good thoughts left for mine !
There were bright troops of undiscovered suns,

Each equal in their radiant course, there were
Clusters of far fair isles which ocean kept
For his own joy, and his waves broke on them
Without a choice; and there was a dim crowd
Of visions, each a part of some grand whole:
And one star left his peers and came with peace
Upon a storm, and all eyes pined for him;
And one isle harboured a sea-beaten ship,
And the crew wandered in its bowers and plucked
Its fruits and gave up all their hopes of home;
And one dream came to a pale poet's sleep,
And he said, "I am singled out by God,
"No sin must touch me." Words are wild and weak,
But what they would express is,—Leave me not,
Still sit by me with beating breast and hair
Loosened, be watching earnest by my side,
Turning my books or kissing me when I
Look up—like summer wind! Be still to me
A help to music's mystery which mind fails
To fathom, its solution, no mere clue!
O reason's pedantry, life's rule prescribed!
I hopeless, I the loveless, hope and love.
Wiser and better, know me now, not when
You loved me as I was. Smile not! I have
Much yet to dawn on you, to gladden you.

No more of the past ! I'll look within no more.
I have too trusted my own lawless wants,
Too trusted my vain self, vague intuition—
Draining soul's wine alone in the still night,
And seeing how, as gathering films arose,
As by an inspiration life seemed bare
And grinning in its vanity, while ends
Foul to be dreamed of, smiled at me as fixed
And fair, while others changed from fair to foul
As a young witch turns an old hag at night.
No more of this ! We will go hand in hand,
I with thee, even as a child—love's slave,
Looking no farther than his liege commands.

And thou hast chosen where this life shall be :
The land which gave me thee shall be our home,
Where nature lies all wild amid her lakes
And snow-swathed mountains and vast pines begirt
With ropes of snow—where nature lies all bare,
Suffering none to view her but a race
Or stunted or deformed, like the mute dwarfs
Which wait upon a naked Indian queen.
And there (the time being when the heavens are thick
With storm) I'll sit with thee while thou dost sing
Thy native songs, gay as a desert bird
Which crieth as it flies for perfect joy,

Or telling me old stories of dead knights ;
Or I will read great lays to thee—how she,
The fair pale sister, went to her chill grave
With power to love and to be loved and live :
Or we will go together, like twin gods
Of the infernal world, with scented lamp
Over the dead, to call and to awake,
Over the unshaped images which lie
Within my mind's cave : only leaving all,
That tells of the past doubt So, when spring comes
With sunshine back again like an old smile,
And the fresh waters and awakened birds
And budding woods await us, I shall be
Prepared, and we will question life once more,
Till its old sense shall come renewed by change,
Like some clear thought which harsh words veiled before ;
Feeling God loves us, and that all which errs
Is but a dream which death will dissipate.
And then what need of longer exile ? Seek
My England, and, again there, calm approach
All I once fled from, calmly look on those
The works of my past weakness, as one views
Some scene where danger met him long before.
Ah that such pleasant life should be but dreamed !

But whate'er come of it, and though it fade,

And though ere the cold morning all be gone,
As it may be ;—tho' music wait to wile,
And strange eyes and bright wine lure, laugh like sin
Which steals back softly on a soul half saved,
And I the first deny, decry, despise,
With this avowal, these intents so fair,—
Still be it all my own, this moment's pride !
No less I make an end in perfect joy.
E'en in my brightest time, a lurking fear
Possessed me : I well knew my weak resolves,
I felt the witchery that makes mind sleep
Over its treasure, as one half afraid
To make his riches definite : but now
These feelings shall not utterly be lost,
I shall not know again that nameless care
Lest, leaving all undone in youth, some new
And undreamed end reveal itself too late :
For this song shall remain to tell for ever
That when I lost all hope of such a change,
Suddenly beauty rose on me again.
No less I make an end in perfect joy,
For I, who thus again was visited,
Shall doubt not many another bliss awaits,
And, though this weak soul sink and darkness overwhelm,
Some little word shall light it, raise aloft,
To where I clearer see and better love,

As I again go o'er the tracts of thought
Like one who has a right, and I shall live
With poets, calmer, purer still each time,
And beauteous shapes will come for me to seize,
And unknown secrets will be trusted me
Which were denied the waverer once ; but now
I shall be priest and prophet as of old.

✓ Sun-treader, I believe in God and truth
And love ; and as one just escaped from death
Would bind himself in bands of friends to feel
He lives indeed, so, I would lean on thee !
Thou must be ever with me, most in gloom
If such must come, but chiefly when I die,
For I seem, dying, as one going in the dark
To fight a giant : but live thou for ever,
And be to all what thou hast been to me !
All in whom this wakes pleasant thoughts of me
Know my last state is happy, free from doubt
Or touch of fear. Love me and wish me well.

RICHMOND
October 22, 1832.

S O R D E L L O .

TO J. MILSAND, OF DIJON.

DEAR FRIEND,—Let the next poem be introduced by your name, therefore remembered along with one of the deepest of my affections, and so repay all trouble it ever cost me. I wrote it twenty-five years ago for only a few, counting even in these on somewhat more care about its subject than they really had. My own faults of expression were many; but with care for a man or book such would be surmounted, and without it what avails the faultlessness of either? I blame nobody, least of all myself, who did my best then and since; for I lately gave time and pains to turn my work into what the many might,—instead of what the few must,—like but after all, I imagined another thing at first, and therefore leave as I find it. The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires, and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul. little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so—you, with many known and unknown to me, think so—others may one day think so; and whether my attempt remain for them or not, I trust, though away and past it, to continue ever yours,

R. B.

LONDON: *June 9, 1863.*

SORDELLO.

1840.

BOOK THE FIRST.

Who will, may hear Sordello's story told :
His story? Who believes me shall behold
The man, pursue his fortunes to the end,
Like me : for as the friendless-people's friend
Spied from his hill-top once, despite the din
And dust of multitudes, Pentapolin
Named o' the Naked Arm, I single out
Sordello, compassed murkily about
With ravage of six long sad hundred years.
Only believe me. Ye believe?

Appears

Verona . . . Never,—I should warn you first,—
Of my own choice had this, if not the worst
Yet not the best expedient, served to tell

A story I could body forth so well
By making speak, myself kept out of view,
The very man as he was wont to do,
And leaving you to say the rest for him.
Since, though I might be proud to see the dim
Abysmal past divide its hateful surge,
Letting of all men this one man emerge
Because it pleased me, yet, that moment past,
I should delight in watching first to last
His progress as you watch it, not a whit
More in the secret than yourselves who sit
Fresh-chapleted to listen. But it seems
Your setters-forth of unexampled themes,
Makers of quite new men, producing them,
Would best chalk broadly on each vesture's hem
The wearer's quality ; or take their stand,
Motley on back and pointing-pole in hand,
Beside him. So, for once I face ye, friends,
Summoned together from the world's four ends,
Dropped down from heaven or cast up from hell,
To hear the story I propose to tell.
Confess now, poets know the dragnet's trick,
Catching the dead, if fate denies the quick,
And shaming her ; 't is not for fate to choose
Silence or song because she can refuse
Real eyes to glisten more, real hearts to ache

Less oft, real brows turn smoother for our sake :
I have experienced something of her spite ;
But there 's a realm wherein she has no right
And I have many lovers. Say, but few
Friends fate accords me? Here they are : now view
The host I muster ! Many a lighted face
Foul with no vestige of the grave's disgrace ;
What else should tempt them back to taste our air
Except to see how their successors fare?
My audience ! and they sit, each ghostly man
Striving to look as living as he can,
Brother by breathing brother ; thou art set,
Clear-witted critic, by . . . but I 'll not fret
A wondrous soul of them, nor move death's spleen
Who loves not to unlock them. Friends ! I mean
The living in good earnest—ye elect
Chiefly for love—suppose not I reject
Judicious praise, who contrary shall peep,
Some fit occasion, forth, for fear ye sleep,
To glean your bland approvals. Then, appear,
Verona ! stay—thou, spirit, come not near
Now—not this time desert thy cloudy place
To scare me, thus employed, with that pure face !
I need not fear this audience, I make free
With them, but then this is no place for thee !
The thunder-phrase of the Athenian, grown

Up out of memories of Marathon,
Would echo like his own sword's griding screech
Braying a Persian shield,—the silver speech
Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin,
Turn intense as a trumpet sounding in
The knights to tilt,—wert thou to hear! What heart
Have I to play my puppets, bear my part
Before these worthies?

Lo, the past is hurled
In twain: up-thrust, out-staggering on the world,
Subsiding into shape, a darkness rears
Its outline, kindles at the core, appears
Verona. 'T is six hundred years and more
Since an event. The Second Friedrich wore
The purple, and the Third Honorius filled
The holy chair. That autumn eve was stilled:
A last remains of sunset dimly burned
O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
In one long flare of crimson; as a brand,
The woods beneath lay black. A single eye
From all Verona cared for the soft sky.
But, gathering in its ancient market-place,
Talked group with restless group; and not a face
But wrath made livid, for among them were
Death's staunch purveyors, such as have in care

To feast him. Fear had long since taken root
In every breast, and now these crushed its fruit,
The ripe hate, like a wine: to note the way
It worked while each grew drunk ' Men grave and grey
Stood, with shut eyelids, rocking to and fro,
Letting the silent luxury trickle slow
About the hollows where a heart should be ;
But the young gulped with a delirious glee
Some foretaste of their first debauch in blood
At the fierce news : for, be it understood,
Envoys apprised Verona that her prince
Count Richard of Saint Boniface, joined since
A year with Azzo, Este's Lord, to thrust
Taurello Salinguerra, prime in trust
With Ecelin Romano, from his seat
Ferrara,—over zealous in the feat
And stumbling on a peril unaware,
Was captive, trammelled in his proper snare,
They phrase it, taken by his own intrigue.
Immediate succour from the Lombard League
Of fifteen cities that affect the Pope,
For Azzo, therefore, and his fellow-hope
Of the Guelf cause, a glory overcast '
Men's faces, late agape, are now aghast.
“ Prone is the purple pavis ; Este makes
“ Mirth for the devil when he undertakes

“ To play the Ecelin ; as if it cost
“ Merely your pushing-by to gain a post
“ Like his ! The patron tells ye, once for all,
“ There be sound reasons that preferment fall
“ On our beloved ” . . .

“ Duke o’ the Rood, why not ? ”

Shouted an Estian, “ grudge ye such a lot ?
“ The hill-cat boasts some cunning of her own,
“ Some stealthy trick to better beasts unknown,
“ That quick with prey enough her hunger blunts,
“ And feeds her fat while gaunt the lion hunts.”

“ Taurello,” quoth an envoy, “ as in wane
“ Dwelt at Ferrara. Like an osprey fain
“ To fly but forced the earth his couch to make
“ Far inland, till his friend the tempest wake,
“ Wants he the Kaiser’s coming ; and as yet
“ That fast friend sleeps, and he too sleeps : but let
“ Only the billow freshen, and he snuffs
“ The aroused hurricane ere it enroughs
“ The sea it means to cross because of him.
“ Sinketh the breeze ? His hope-sick eye grows dim
“ Creep closer on the creature ! Every day
“ Strengthens the Pontiff ; Ecelin, they say,
“ Dozes now at Oliero, with dry lips
“ Telling upon his perished finger-tips
“ How many ancestors are to depose

“ Ere he be Satan’s Viceroy when the doze
“ Deposits him in hell. So, Guelfs rebuilt
“ Their houses ; not a drop of blood was spilt
“ When Cino Bocchimpano chanced to meet
“ Buccio Virtù—God’s wafer, and the street
“ Is narrow ! Tutti Santi, think, a-swarm
“ With Ghibellins, and yet he took no harm !
“ This could not last. Off Salinguerra went
“ To Padua, Podestà, ‘with pure intent,’
“ Said he, ‘my presence, judged the single bar
“ ‘To permanent tranquillity, may jar
“ ‘No longer’—so ! his back is fairly turned ?
“ The pair of goodly palaces are burned,
“ The gardens ravaged, and our Guelfs laugh, drunk
“ A week with joy. The next, their laughter sunk
“ In sobs of blood, for they found, some strange way,
“ Old Salinguerra back again—I say,
“ Old Salinguerra in the town once more
“ Uprooting, overturning, flame before,
“ Blood fetlock-high beneath him. Azzo fled ;
“ Who ’scaped the carnage followed ; then the dead
“ Were pushed aside from Salinguerra’s throne,
“ He ruled once more Ferrara, all alone,
“ Till Azzo, stunned awhile, revived, would pounce
“ Coupled with Boniface, like lynx and ounce,
“ On the gorged bird. The burghers ground their teeth

“To see troop after troop encamp beneath
“I’ the standing corn thick o’er the scanty patch
“It took so many patient months to snatch
“Out of the marsh ; while just within their walls
“Men fed on men. At length Taurello calls
“A parley : ‘let the Count wind up the war !’
“Richard, light-hearted as a plunging star,
“Agrees to enter for the kindest ends
“Ferrara, flanked with fifty chosen friends,
“No horse-boy more, for fear your timid sort
“Should fly Ferrara at the bare report.
“Quietly through the town they rode, jog-jog ;
“‘Ten, twenty, thirty,—curse the catalogue
“‘Of burnt Guelf houses ! Strange, Taurello shows
“‘Not the least sign of life’—whereat arose
“A general growl : ‘How? With his victors by?
“‘I and my Veronese? My troops and I?
“‘Receive us, was your word?’ So jogged they on,
“Nor laughed their host too openly : once gone
“Into the trap!—”

Six hundred years ago!

Such the time’s aspect and peculiar woe
(Yourselves may spell it yet in chronicles,
Albeit the worm, our busy brother, drills
His sprawling path through letters anciently
Made fine and large to suit some abbot’s eye)

When the new Hohenstauffen dropped the mask,
Flung John of Brienne's favour from his casque,
Forswore crusading, had no mind to leave
Saint Peter's proxy leisure to retrieve
Losses to Otho and to Barbaross,
Or make the Alps less easy to recross ;
And, thus confirming Pope Honorius' fear,
Was excommunicate that very year.
"The triple-bearded Teuton come to life!"
Groaned the Great League ; and, arming for the strife,
Wide Lombardy, on tiptoe to begin,
Took up, as it was Guelf or Ghibellin,
Its cry : what cry ?

"The Emperor to come !"

His crowd of feudatories, all and some,
That leapt down with a crash of swords, spears, shields,
One fighter on his fellow, to our fields,
Scattered anon, took station here and there,
And carried it, till now, with little care—
Cannot but cry for him ; how else rebut
Us longer?—cliffs, an earthquake suffered jut
In the mid-sea, each domineering crest
Which nought save such another throe can wrest
From out (conceive) a certain chokeweed grown
Since o'er the waters, twine and tangle thrown
Too thick, too fast accumulating round,

Too sure to over-riot and confound
Ere long each brilliant islet with itself,
Unless a second shock save shoal and shelf,
Whirling the sea-drift wide : alas, the bruised
And sullen wreck ! Sunlight to be diffused
For that !—sunlight, 'neath which, a scum at first,
The million fibres of our chokeweed nurst
Dispread themselves, mantling the troubled main,
And, shattered by those rocks, took hold again,
So kindly blazed it—that same blaze to brood
O'er every cluster of the multitude
Still hazarding new clasps, ties, filaments,
An emulous exchange of pulses, vents
Of nature into nature ; till some growth
Unfancied yet, exuberantly clothe
A surface solid now, continuous, one :
“ The Pope, for us the People, who begun
“ The People, carries on the People thus,
“ To keep that Kaiser off and dwell with us ! ”
See you ?

Or say, Two Principles that live
Each fitly by its Representative.
“ Hill-cat ”—who called him so ?—the gracefulest
Adventurer, the ambiguous stranger-guest
Of Lombardy (sleek but that ruffling fur,
Those talons to their sheath !) whose velvet purr

Soothes jealous neighbours when a Saxon scout
—Arpo or Yoland, is it?—one without
A country or a name, presumes to couch
Beside their noblest ; until men avouch
That, of all Houses in the Trevisan,
Conrad describes no fitter, rear or van,
Than Ecelo ! They laughed as they enrolled
That name at Milan on the page of gold,
Godego's lord,—Ramon, Marostica,
Cartighion, Bassano, Loria,
And every sheep-cote on the Suabian's fief !
No laughter when his son, “the Lombard Chief”
Forsooth, as Barbarossa's path was bent
To Italy along the Vale of Trent,
Welcomed him at Roncaglia ! Sadness now—
The hamlets nested on the Tyrol's brow,
The Asolan and Euganean hills,
The Rhetian and the Julian, sadness fills
Them all, for Ecelin vouchsafes to stay
Among and care about them ; day by day
Choosing this pinnacle, thè other spot,
A castle building to defend a cot,
A cot built for a castle to defend,
Nothing but castles, castles, nor an end
To boasts how mountain ridge may join with ridge
By sunken gallery and soaring bridge.

He takes, in brief, a figure that beseems
The griesliest nightmare of the Church's dreams,
—A Signory firm-rooted, unestranged
From its old interests, and nowise changed
By its new neighbourhood : perchance the vaunt
Of Otho, "my own Este shall supplant ,
"Your Este," come to pass. The sire led in
A son as cruel ; and this Ecelin
Had sons, in turn, and daughters sly and tall
And curling and compliant ; but for all
Romano (so they styled him) throve, that neck
Of his so pinched and white, that hungry cheek
Proved 't was some fiend, not him, the man's-flesh went
To feed : whereas Romano's instrument,
Famous Taurello Salinguerra, sole
I' the world, a tree whose boughs were slipt the bole
Successively, why should not he shed blood
To further a design ? Men understood
Living was pleasant to him as he wore
His careless surcoat, glanced some missive o'er,
Propped on his truncheon in the public way,
While his lord lifted writhen hands to pray,
Lost at Oliero's convent.

Hill-cats, face
Our Azzo, our Guelf Lion ! Why disgrace
A worthiness conspicuous near and far

(Atii at Rome while free and consular,
Este at Padua who repulsed the Hun)
By trumpeting the Church's princely son?
—Styled Patron of Rovigo's Polesine,
Ancona's march, Ferrara's . . . ask, in fine,
Our chronicles, commenced when some old monk
Found it intolerable to be sunk
(Vexed to the quick by his revolting cell)
Quite out of summer while alive and well:
Ended when by his mat the Prior stood,
'Mid busy promptings of the brotherhood,
Striving to coax from his decrepit brains
The reason Father Porphyry took pains
To blot those ten lines out which used to stand
First on their charter drawn by Hildebrand.

The same night wears. Verona's rule of yore
Was vested in a certain Twenty-four;
And while within his palace these debate
Concerning Richard and Ferrara's fate,
Glide we by clapping doors, with sudden glare
Of cressets vented on the dark, nor care
For aught that 's seen or heard until we shut
The smother in, the lights, all noises but
The carroch's booming: safe at last! Why strange
Such a recess should lurk behind a range
Of banquet-rooms? Your finger—thus—you push

A spring, and the wall opens, would you rush
Upon the banqueters, select your prey,
Waiting (the slaughter-weapons in the way
Strewing this very bench) with sharpened ear
A preconcerted signal to appear ;
Or if you simply crouch with beating heart,
Bearing in some voluptuous pageant part
To startle them. Nor mutes nor masquers now ;
Nor any . . . does that one man sleep whose brow
The dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er ?
What woman stood beside him ? not the more
Is he unfastened from the earnest eyes
Because that arras fell between ! Her wise
And lulling words are yet about the room,
Her presence wholly poured upon the gloom
Down even to her vesture's creeping stir.
And so reclines he, saturate with her,
Until an outcry from the square beneath
Pierces the charm : he springs up, glad to breathe,
Above the cunning element, and shakes
The stupor off as (look you) morning breaks
On the gay dress, and, near concealed by it,
The lean frame like a half-burnt taper, lit •
Erst at some marriage-feast, then laid away
Till the Armenian bridegroom's dying day,
In his wool wedding-robe.

For he—for he,
Gate-vein of this hearts' blood of Lombardy,
(If I should falter now)—for he is thine !
Sordello, thy forerunner, Florentine !
A herald-star I know thou didst absorb
Relentless into the consummate orb
That scared it from its right to roll along
A sempiternal path with dance and song
Fulfilling its allotted period,
Serenest of the progeny of God—
Who yet resigns it not ! His darling stoops
With no quenched lights, desponds with no blank troops
Of disenfranchised brilliances, for, blent
Utterly with thee, its shy element
Like thine upburneth prosperous and clear.
Still, what if I approach the august sphere
Named now with only one name, disentwine
That under-current soft and argentine
From its fierce mate in the majestic mass
Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixt with glass
In John's transcendent vision,—launch once more
That lustre? Dante, pacer of the shore
Where gluttred hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume—
Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope
Into a darkness quieted by hope ;

Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
In gracious twilights where his chosen lie,—
I would do this ! If I should falter now !

In Mantua territory half is slough,
Half pine-tree forest ; maples, scarlet oaks
Breed o'er the river-beds ; even Mincio chokes
With sand the summer through : but 't is morass
In winter up to Mantua walls. There was,
Some thirty years before this evening's coil,
One spot reclaimed from the surrounding spoil,
Goito ; just a castle built amid
A few low mountains ; firs and larches hid
Their main defiles, and rings of vineyard bound
The rest. Some captured creature in a pound,
Whose artless wonder quite precludes distress,
Secure beside in its own loveliness,
So peered with airy head, below, above,
The castle at its toils, the lapwings love
To glean among at grape-time. Pass within.
A maze of corridors contrived for sin,
Dusk winding-stairs, dim galleries got past,
You gain the inmost chambers, gain at last
A maple-panelled room : that haze which seems
Floating about the panel, if there gleams
A sunbeam over it, will turn to gold
And in light-graven characters unfold

The Arab's wisdom everywhere ; what shade
Marred them a moment, those slim pillars made,
Cut like a company of palms to prop
The roof, each kissing top entwined with top,
Leaning together ; in the carver's mind
Some knot of bacchanals, flushed cheek combined
With straining forehead, shoulders purpled, hair
Diffused between, who in a goat-skin bear
A vintage ; graceful sister-palms ! But quick
To the main wonder, now. A vault, see, thick
Black shade about the ceiling, though fine slits
Across the buttress suffer light by fits
Upon a marvel in the midst. Nay, stoop—
A dullish grey-streaked cumbrous font, a group
Round it,—each side of it, where'er one sees,—
Upholds it ; shrinking Caryatides
Of just-tinged marble like Eve's lilyed flesh
Beneath her maker's finger when the fresh
First pulse of life shot brightening the snow.
The font's edge burthens every shoulder, so
They muse upon the ground, eyelids half closed ;
Some, with meek arms behind their backs disposed,
Some, crossed above their bosoms, some, to veil
Their eyes, some, propping chin and cheek so pale,
Some, hanging slack an utter helpless length
Dead as a buried vestal whose whole strength

Goes when the grate above shuts heavily.
So dwell these noiseless girls, patient to see,
Like priestesses because of sin impure
Penanced for ever, who resigned endure,
Having that once drunk sweetness to the dregs.
And every eve, Sordello's visit begs
Pardon for them : constant as eve he came
To sit beside each in her turn, the same
As one of them, a certain space : and awe
Made a great indistinctness till he saw
Sunset slant cheerful through the buttress-chinks,
Gold seven times globed ; surely our maiden shrinks
And a smile stirs her as if one faint grain
Her load were lightened, one shade less the stain
Obscured her forehead, yet one more bead slipt
From off the rosary whereby the crypt
Keeps count of the contritions of its charge?
Then with a step more light, a heart more large,
He may depart, leave her and every one
To linger out the penance in mute stone.
Ah, but Sordello ? 'T is the tale I mean
To tell you.

In this castle may be seen,
On the hill tops, or underneath the vines,
Or eastward by the mound of firs and pines
That shuts out Mantua, still in loneliness,

A slender boy in a loose page's dress,
Sordello : do but look on him awhile
Watching ('t is autumn) with an earnest smile
The noisy flock of thievish birds at work
Among the yellowing vineyards ; see him lurk
('T is winter with its sullenest of storms)
Beside that arras-length of broidered forms,
On tiptoe, lifting in both hands a light
Which makes yon warrior's visage flutter bright
—Ecelo, dismal father of the brood,
And Ecelin, close to the girl he wooed,
Auria, and their Child, with all his wives
From Agnes to the Tuscan that survives,
Lady of the castle, Adelaide. His face
—Look, now he turns away ! Yourselves shall trace
(The delicate nostril swerving wide and fine,
A sharp and restless lip, so well combine
With that calm brow) a soul fit to receive
Delight at every sense ; you can believe
Sordello foremost in the regal class
Nature has broadly severed from her mass
Of men, and framed for pleasure, as she frames
Some happy lands, that have luxurious names,
For loose fertility ; a footfall there
Suffices to upturn to the warm air
Half-germinating spices ; mere decay

Produces richer life ; and day by day
New pollen on the lily-petal grows,
And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.
You recognise at once the finer dress
Of flesh that amply lets in loveliness
At eye and ear, while round the rest is furled
(As though she would not trust them with her world)
A veil that shows a sky not near so blue,
And lets but half the sun look fervid through.
How can such love?—like souls on each full-fraught
Discovery brooding, blind at first to aught
Beyond its beauty, till exceeding love
Becomes an aching weight ; and, to remove
A curse that haunts such natures—to preclude
Their finding out themselves can work no good
To what they love nor make it very blest
By their endeavour,—they are fain invest
The lifeless thing with life from their own soul,
Availing it to purpose, to control,
To dwell distinct and have peculiar joy
And separate interests that may employ
That beauty fitly, for its proper sake.
Nor rest they here ; fresh births of beauty wake
Fresh homage, every grade of love is past,
With every mode of loveliness : then cast
Inferior idols off their borrowed crown

Before a coming glory. Up and down
Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine
To throb the secret forth ; a touch divine—
And the scaled eyeball owns the mystic rod ;
Visibly through his garden walketh God.

So fare they. Now revert. One character
Denotes them through the progress and the stir,—
A need to blend with each external charm,
Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm,—
In something not themselves ; they would belong
To what they worship—stronger and more strong
Thus prodigally fed—which gathers shape
And feature, soon imprisons past escape
The votary framed to love and to submit
Nor ask, as passionate he kneels to it,
Whence grew the idol's empery. So runs
A legend ; light had birth ere moons and suns,
Flowing through space a river and alone,
Till chaos burst and blank the spheres were strown
Hither and thither, foundering and blind :
When into each of them rushed light—to find
Itself no place, foiled of its radiant chance.
Let such forego their just inheritance !
For there 's a class that eagerly looks, too,
On beauty, but, unlike the gentler crew,
Proclaims each new revealment born a twin

Is vindicated so, obtains its place
In thy ascent, the first of us ; whom we
May follow, to the meanest, finally,
With our more bounded wills ?

Ah, but to find

A certain mood enervate such a mind,
Counsel it slumber in the solitude
Thus reached nor, stooping, task for mankind's good
Its nature just as life and time accord
“—Too narrow an arena to reward
“Emprize—the world's occasion worthless since
“Not absolutely fitted to evince
“Its mastery !” Or if yet worse befall,
And a desire possess it to put all
That nature forth, forcing our straitened sphere
Contain it,—to display completely here
The mastery another life should learn,
Thrusting in time eternity's concern,—
So that Sordello. . . .

Fool, who spied the mark
Of leprosy upon him, violet-dark
Already as he loiters? Born just now,
With the new century, beside the glow
And efflorescence out of barbarism ;
Witness a Greek or two from the abysm
That stray through Florence-town with studious air,

Calming the chisel of that Pisan pair :
If Nicolo should carve a Christus yet !
While at Siena is Guidone set,
Forehead on hand ; a painful birth must be
Matured ere Saint Eufemia's sacristy
Or transept gather fruits of one great gaze
At the moon : look you ! The same orange haze,—
The same blue stripe round that—and, in the midst,
Thy spectral whiteness, Mother-maid, who didst
Pursue the dizzy painter !

Woe, then, worth
Any officious babble letting forth
The leprosy confirmed and ruinous
To spirit lodged in a contracted house !
Go back to the beginning, rather ; blend
It gently with Sordello's life ; the end
Is piteous, you may see, but much between
Pleasant enough. Meantime, some pyx to screen
The full-grown pest, some lid to shut upon
The goblin ! So they found at Babylon,
(Colleagues, mad Lucius and sage Antonine)
Sacking the city, by Apollo's shrine,
In rummaging among the rarities,
A certain coffer ; he who made the prize
Opened it greedily ; and out there curled
Just such another plague, for half the world

Was stung. Crawl in then, hag, and couch asquat,
Keeping that blotchy bosom thick in spot
Until your time is ripe ! The coffer-lid
Is fastened, and the coffer safely hid
Under the Loxian's choicest gifts of gold.

Who will may hear Sordello's story told,
And how he never could remember when
He dwelt not at Goito. Calmly, then,
About this secret lodge of Adelaide's
Glided his youth away ; beyond the glades
On the fir-forest border, and the rim
Of the low range of mountain, was for him
No other world : but this appeared his own
To wander through at pleasure and alone.
The castle too seemed empty ; far and wide
Might he disport ; only the northern side
Lay under a mysterious interdict—
Slight, just enough remembered to restrict
His roaming to the corridors, the vault
Where those font-bearers expiate their fault,
The maple-chamber, and the little nooks
And nests, and breezy parapet that looks
Over the woods to Mantua : there he strolled.
Some foreign women-servants, very old,
Tended and crept about him—all his clue
To the world's business and embroiled ado
Distant a dozen hill-tops at the most.

And first a simple sense of life engrossed
Sordello in his drowsy Paradise ;
The day's adventures for the day suffice—
Its constant tribute of perceptions strange,
With sleep and stir in healthy interchange,
Suffice, and leave him for the next at ease
Like the great palmer-worm that strips the trees,
Eats the life out of every luscious plant,
And, when September finds them sere or scant,
Puts forth two wondrous winglets, alters quite,
And hies him after unforeseen delight.
So fed Sordello, not a shard dissheathed ;
As ever, round each new discovery, wreathed
Luxuriantly the fancies infantine
His admiration, bent on making fine
Its novel friend at any risk, would fling
In gay profusion forth : a ficklest king,
Confessed those minions !—eager to dispense
So much from his own stock of thought and sense
As might enable each to stand alone
And serve him for a fellow ; with his own,
Joining the qualities that just before
Had graced some older favourite. Thus they wore
A fluctuating halo, yesterday
Set flicker and to-morrow filched away,—
Those upland objects each of separate name,

Each with an aspect never twice the same,
Waxing and waning as the new-born host
Of fancies, like a single night's hoar-frost,
Gave to familiar things a face grotesque ;
Only, preserving through the mad burlesque
A grave regard. Conceive ! the orpine patch
Blossoming earliest on the log-house thatch
The day those archers wound along the vines—
Related to the Chief that left their lines
To climb with clinking step the northern stair
Up to the solitary chambers where
Sordello never came. Thus thrall reached thrall ;
He o'er-festooning every interval,
As the adventurous spider, making light
Of distance, shoots her threads from depth to height.
From barbican to battlement : so flung
Fantasies forth and in their centre swung
Our architect,—the breezy morning fresh
Above, and merry,—all his waving mesh
Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.

This world of ours by tacit pact is pledged
To laying such a spangled fabric low
Whether by gradual brush or gallant blow.
But its abundant will was baulked here : doubt
Rose tardily in one so fenced about
From most that nurtures judgment,—care and pain :

Judgment, that dull expedient we are fain,
Less favoured, to adopt betimes and force
Stead us, diverted from our natural course
Of joys—contrive some yet amid the dearth,
Vary and render them, it may be, worth
Most we forego. Suppose Sordello hence
Selfish enough, without a moral sense
However feeble ; what informed the boy
Others desired a portion in his joy ?
Or say a ruthless chance broke woof and warp—
A heron's nest beat down by March winds sharp,
A fawn breathless beneath the precipice,
A bird with unsoiled breast and unfilmed eyes
Warm in the brake—could these undo the trance
Lapping Sordello? Not a circumstance
That makes for you, friend Naddo ! Eat fern-seed
And peer beside us and report indeed
If (your word) “genius” dawned with throes and
stings
And the whole fiery catalogue, while springs,
Summers, and winters quietly came and went.
Time put at length that period to content,
By right the world should have imposed : bereft
Of its good offices, Sordello, left
To study his companions, managed rip
Their fringe off, learn the true relationship,

Core with its crust, their nature with his own :
Amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone.
As if the poppy felt with him ! Though he
Partook the poppy's red effrontery
Till Autumn spoiled their fleering quite with rain,
And, turbanless, a coarse brown rattling crane
Lay bare. That 's gone : yet why renounce, for that,
His disenchanted tributaries—flat
Perhaps, but scarce so utterly forlorn,
Their simple presence might not well be borne
Whose parley was a transport once : recall
The poppy's gifts, it flaunts you, after all,
A poppy :—why distrust the evidence
Of each soon satisfied and healthy sense?
The new-born judgment answered, “ little boots
“ Beholding other creatures' attributes
“ And having none !” or, say that it sufficed,
“ Yet, could one but possess, oneself,” (enticed
Judgment) “ some special office !” Nought beside
Serves you? “ Well then, be somehow justified
“ For this ignoble wish to circumscribe
“ And concentrate, rather than swell, the tribe
“ Of actual pleasures : what, now, from without
“ Effects it?—proves, despite a lurking doubt,
“ Mere sympathy sufficient, trouble spared?
“ That, tasting joys by proxy thus, you fared

“The better for them?” Thus much craved his soul,
Alas, from the beginning love is whole
And true ; if sure of nought beside, most sure
Of its own truth at least ; nor may endure
A crowd to see its face, that cannot know
How hot the pulses throb its heart below.
While its own helplessness and utter want
Of means to worthily be ministrant
To what it worships, do but fan the more
Its flame, exalt the idol far before
Itself as it would have it ever be.
Souls like Sordello, on the contrary,
Coerced and put to shame, retaining will,
Care little, take mysterious comfort still,
But look forth tremblingly to ascertain
If others judge their claims not urged in vain,
And say for them their stifled thoughts aloud.
So, they must ever live before a crowd :
—“Vanity,” Naddo tells you.

Whence contrive

A crowd, now? From these women just alive,
That archer-troop? Forth glided—not alone
Each painted warrior, every girl of stone,
Nor Adelaide (bent double o’er a scroll,
One maiden at her knees, that eve, his soul
Shook as he stumbled through the arras’d glooms

On them, for, 'mid quaint robes and weird perfumes,
Started the meagre Tuscan up,—her eyes,
The maiden's, also, bluer with surprise)
—But the entire out-world: whatever, scraps
And snatches, song and story, dreams perhaps,
Conceited the world's offices, and he
Had hitherto transferred to flower or tree,
Not counted a befitting heritage
Each, of its own right, singly to engage
Some man, no other,—such now dared to stand
Alone. Strength, wisdom, grace on every hand
Soon disengaged themselves, and he discerned
A sort of human life. at least, was turned
A stream of lifelike figures through his brain.
Lord, liegeman, valvassor and suzerain,
Ere he could choose, surrounded him; a stuff
To work his pleasure on; there, sure enough:
But as for gazing, what shall fix that gaze?
Are they to simply testify the ways
He who convoked them sends his soul along
With the cloud's thunder or a dove's brood-song?
—While they live each his life, boast each his own
Peculiar dower of bliss, stand each alone
In some one point where something dearest loved
Is easiest gained—far worthier to be proved
Than aught he envies in the forest-wights!

No simple and self-evident delights,
But mixed desires of unimagined range,
Contrasts or combinations, new and strange,
Irk some perhaps, yet plainly recognized
By this, the sudden company—loves prized
By those who are to prize his own amount
Of loves. Once care because such make account,
Allow that foreign recognitions stamp
The current value, and his crowd shall vamp
Him counterfeits enough ; and so their print
Be on the piece, 't is gold, attests the mint,
And “good,” pronounce they whom his new appeal
Is made to : if their casual print conceal—
This arbitrary good of theirs o'ergloss
What he has lived without, nor felt the loss—
Qualities strange, ungainly, wearisome,
—What matter? So must speech expand the dumb
Part-sigh, part-smile with which Sordello, late
Whom no poor woodland-sights could satiate,
Betakes himself to study hungrily
Just what the puppets his crude phantasy
Supposes notablest,—popes, kings, priests, knights,—
May please to promulgate for appetites ;
Accepting all their artificial joys
Not as he views them, but as he employs
Each shape to estimate the other's stock

Of attributes, whereon—a marshalled flock
Of authorized enjoyments—he may spend
Himself, be men, now, as he used to blend
With tree and flower—nay more entirely, else
'T were mockery: for instance, “How excels
“My life that chieftain’s?” (who apprised the youth
Ecelin, here, becomes this month, in truth,
Imperial Vicar?) “Turns he in his tent
“Remissly? Be it so—my head is bent
“Deliciously amid my girls to sleep.
“What if he stalks the Trentine-pass? Yon steep
“I climbed an hour ago with little toil:
“We are alike there. But can I, too, foil
“The Guelf’s paid stabber, carelessly afford
“Saint Mark’s a spectacle, the sleight o’ the sword
“Baffling the treason in a moment?” Here
No rescue! Poppy he is none, but peer
To Ecelin, assuredly: his hand,
Fashioned no otherwise, should wield a brand
With Ecelin’s success—try, now! He soon
Was satisfied, returned as to the moon
From earth; left each abortive boy’s-attempt
For feats, from failure happily exempt,
In fancy at his beck. “One day I will
“Accomplish it! Are they not older still
“—Not grown-up men and women? ’T is beside

“ Only a dream ; and though I must abide
“ With dreams now, I may find a thorough vent
“ For all myself, acquire an instrument
“ For acting what these people act ; my soul
“ Hunting a body out may gain its whole
“ Desire some day ! ” How else express chagrin
And resignation, show the hope steal in
With which he let sink from an aching wrist
The rough-hewn ash-bow ? Straight, a gold shaft hissed
Into the Syrian air, struck Malek down
Superbly ! “ Crosses to the breach ! God’s Town
“ Is gained him back ! ” Why bend rough ash-bows more ?

Thus lives he : if not careless as before,
Comforted : for one may anticipate,
Rehearse the future, be prepared when fate
Shall have prepared in turn real men whose names
Startle, real places of enormous fames,
Este abroad and Ecelin at home
To worship him,—Mantua, Verona, Rome
To witness it. Who grudges time so spent ?
Rather test qualities to heart’s content—
Summon them, thrice selected, near and far—
Compress the starriest into one star,
And grasp the whole at once !

The pageant thinned
Accordingly ; from rank to rank, like wind

His spirit passed to winnow and divide ;
Back fell the simpler phantasms ; every side
The strong clave to the wise ; with either classed
The beauteous ; so, till two or three amassed
Mankind's beseeemingnesses, and reduced
Themselves eventually,—graces loosed,
Strengths lavished,—all to heighten up One Shape
Whose potency no creature should escape.
Can it be Friedrich of the bowmen's talk ?
Surely that grape-juice, bubbling at the stalk,
Is some grey scorching Saracenic wine
The Kaiser quaffs with the Miramoline—
Those swarthy hazel-clusters, seamed and chapped,
Or filberts russet-sheathed and velvet-capped,
Are dates plucked from the bough John Brienne sent
To keep in mind his sluggish armament
Of Canaan :—Friedrich's, all the pomp and fierce
Demeanour ! But harsh sounds and sights transpierce
So rarely the serene cloud where he dwells
Whose looks enjoin, whose lightest words are spells
On the obdurate ! That right arm indeed
Has thunder for its slave ; but where 's the need
Of thunder if the stricken multitude
Hearkens, arrested in its angriest mood,
While songs go up exulting, then dispread,
Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead

Like an escape of angels? 'T is the tune,
Nor much unlike the words his women croon
Smilingly, colourless and faint-designed
Each, as a worn-out queen's face some remind
Of her extreme youth's love-tales. "Eglamor
"Made that!" Half minstrel and half emperor,
What but ill objects vexed him? 'Such he slew.
The kinder sort were easy to subdue
By those ambrosial glances, dulcet tones;
And these a gracious hand advanced to thrones
Beneath him. Wherefore twist and torture this,
Striving to name afresh the antique bliss,
Instead of saying, neither less nor more,
He had discovered, as our world before,
Apollo? That shall be the name; nor bid
Me rag by rag expose how patchwork hid
The youth—what thefts of every clime and day
Contributed to purfle the array
He climbed with (June at deep) some close ravine
Mid clatter of its million pebbles sheen,
Over which, singing soft, the runnel slipped
Elate with rains: into whose streamlet dipped
He foot, yet trod, you thought, with unwet sock—
Though really on the stubs of living rock
Ages ago it crenelled; vines for roof,
Lindens for wall; before him, aye aloof,

Flittered in the cool some azure damsel-fly,
Born of the simmering quiet, there to die.
Emerging whence, Apollo still, he spied
Mighty descents of forest ; multiplied
Tuft on tuft, here, the frolic myrtle-trees,
There gendered the grave maple stocks at ease.
And, proud^d of its observer, straight the wood
Tried old surprises on him ; black it stood
A sudden barrier ('twas a cloud passed o'er)
So dead and dense, the tiniest brute no more
Must pass ; yet presently (the cloud dispatched)
Each clump, behold, was glistening detached
A shrub, oak-boles shrunk into ilex-stems !
Yet could not he denounce the stratagems
He saw thro', till, hours thence, aloft would hang
White summer-lightnings ; as it sank and sprang
To measure, that whole palpitating breast
Of heaven, 't was Apollo, nature prest
At eve to worship.

Time stole : by degrees

The Pythons perish off ; his votaries
Sink to respectful distance ; songs redeem
Their pains, but briefer ; their dismissals seem
Emphatic ; only girls are very slow
To disappear—his Delians ! Some that glow
O' the instant, more with earlier loves to wrench

Away, reserves to quell, disdains to quench ;
Alike in one material circumstance—
All soon or late adore Apollo ! Glance
The bevy through; divine Apollo's choice,
His Daphne ! "We secure Count Richard's voice
"In Este's counsels, good for Este's ends
"As our Taurello," say his faded friend's,
"By granting him our Palma !"—the sole child,
They mean, of Agnes Este who beguiled
Ecelin, years before this Adelaide
Wedded and turned him wicked : "but the maid
"Rejects his suit," those sleepy women boast.
She, scorning all beside, deserves the most
Sordello : so, conspicuous in his world
Of dreams sat Palma. How the tresses curled
Into a sumptuous swell of gold and wound
About her like a glory ! even the ground
Was bright as with spilt sunbeams ; breathe not, breathe
Not !—poised, see, one leg doubled underneath,
Its small foot buried in the dimpling snow,
Rests, but the other, listlessly below,
O'er the couch-side swings feeling for cool air,
The vein-streaks swollen a richer violet where
The languid blood lies heavily ; yet calm
On her slight prop, each flat and outspread palm,
As but suspended in the act to rise

By consciousness of beauty, whence her eyes
Turn with so frank a triumph, for she meets
Apollo's gaze in the pine glooms.

Time fleets :

That 's worst ! Because the pre-appointed age
Approaches. Fate is tardy with the stage
And crowd she promised. Lean he grows and pale,
Though restlessly at rest. Hardly avail
Fancies to soothe him. Time steals, yet alone
He tarries here ! The earnest smile is gone.
How long this might continue matters not ;
—For ever, possibly ; since to the spot
None come : our lingering Taurello quits
Mantua at last, and light our lady flits—
Back to her place disburthened of a care.
Strange—to be constant here if he is there !
Is it distrust ? Oh, never ! for they both
Goad Ecelin alike, Romano's growth
Is daily manifest, with Azzo dumb
And Richard wavering : let but Friedrich come,
Find matter for the minstrelsy's report
—Lured from the Isle and its young Kaiser's court
To sing us a Messina morning up,
And, double rillet of a drinking cup,
Sparkle along to ease the land of drouth,
Northward to Provence that, and thus far south

The other ! What a method to apprise
Neighbours of births, espousals, obsequies,
Which in their very tongue the Troubadour
Records ! and his performance makes a tour,
For Trouveres bear the miracle about,
Explain its cunning to the vulgar rout,
Until the Formidable House is fâined
Over the country—as Taurello aimed,
Who introduced, although the rest adopt,
The novelty. Such games, her absence stopped,
Begin afresh now Adelaide, recluse
No longer, in the light of day pursues
Her plans at Mantua : whence an accident
Which, breaking on Sordello's mixed content
Opened, like any flash that cures the blind,
The veritable business of mankind.

BOOK THE SECOND

THE woods were long austere with snow : at last
Pink leaflets budded on the beech, and fast
Larches, scattered through pine-tree solitudes,
Brightened, "as in the slumbrous heart o' the woods
"Our buried year, a witch, grew young again
"To placid incantations, and that stain
"About were from her cauldron, green smoke blent
"With those black pines"—so Eglamor gave vent
To a chance fancy. Whence a just rebuke
From his companion ; brother Naddo shook
The solemnest of brows : "Beware," he said,
"Of setting up conceits in nature's stead!"
Forth wandered our Sordello. Nought so sure
As that to-day's adventure will secure
Palma, the visioned lady—only pass
O'er yon damp mound and its exhausted grass,
Under that brake where sundawn feeds the stalks
Of withered fern with gold, into those walks

Of pine and take her! Buoyantly he went.
Again his stooping forehead was besprent
With dew-drops from the skirting ferns. Then wide
Opened the great morass, shot every side
With flashing water through and through; a-shine,
Thick-steaming, all-alive. Whose shape divine,
Quivered it the farthest rainbow-vapour, glanced
Athwart the flying herons? He advanced,
But warily; though Mincio leaped no more,
Each foot-fall burst up in the marish-floor
A diamond jet: and if he stopped to pick
Rose-lichen, or molest the leeches quick,
And circling blood-worms, minnow, newt or loach,
A sudden pond would silently encroach
This way and that. On Palma passed. The verge
Of a new wood was gained. She will emerge
Flushed, now, and panting,—crowds to see,—will own
She loves him—Boniface to hear, to groan,
To leave his suit! One screen of pine-trees still
Opposes: but—the startling spectacle—
Mantua, this time! Under the walls—a crowd
Indeed, real men and women, gay and loud
Round a pavilion. How he stood!

In truth

No prophecy had come to pass: his youth
In its prime now—and where was homage poured

Upon Sordello?—born to be adored,
And suddenly discovered weak, scarce made
To cope with any, cast into the shade
By this and this. Yet something seemed to prick
And tingle in his blood ; a sleight—a trick—
And much would be explained. It went for nought—
The best of their endowments were ill bought
With his identity : nay, the conceit,
That this day's roving led to Palma's feet
Was not so vain—list ! The word, “Palma !” Steal
Aside, and die, Sordello ; this is real,
And this—abjure !

What next ? The curtains see
Dividing ! She is there ; and presently
He will be there—the proper You, at length—
In your own cherished dress of grace and strength :
Most like, the very Boniface !

Not so.

It was a showy man advanced ; but though
A glad cry welcomed him, then every sound
Sank and the crowd disposed themselves around,
—“This is not he,” Sordello felt ; while, “Place
“For the best Troubadour of Boniface !”
Hollaed the Jongleurs,—“Eglamor, whose lay
“Concludes his patron's Court of Love to-day !”
Obsequious Naddo strung the master's lute

With the new lute-string, "Elys," named to suit
The song: he stealthily at watch, the while,
Biting his lip to keep down a great smile
Of pride: then up he struck. Sordello's brain
Swam; for he knew a sometime deed again;
So, could supply each foolish gap and chasm
The minstrel left in his enthusiasm,
Mistaking its true version—was the tale
Not of Apollo? Only, what avail
Luring her down, that Elys an he pleased,
If the man dared no further? Has he ceased
And, lo, the people's frank applause half done,
Sordello was beside him, had begun
(Spite of indignant twitchings from his friend
The Trouvere) the true lay with the true end,
Taking the other's names and time and place
For his. On flew the song, a giddy race,
After the flying story; word made leap
Out word, rhyme—rhyme; the lay could barely keep
Pace with the action visibly rushing past:
Both ended. Back fell Naddo more aghast
Than some Egyptian from the harassed bull
That wheeled abrupt and, bellowing, fronted full
His plague, who spied a scarab 'neath the tongue,
And found 't was Apis' flank his hasty prong
Insulted. But the people—but the cries,

The crowding round, and proffering the prize!
—For he had gained some prize. He seemed to shrink
Into a sleepy cloud, just at whose brink
One sight withheld him. There sat Adelaide,
Silent; but at her knees the very maid
Of the North Chamber, her red lips as rich,
The same pure fleecy hair; one weft of which,
Golden and great, quite touched his cheek as o'er
She leant, speaking some six words and no more.
He answered something, anything; and she
Unbound a scarf and laid it heavily
Upon him, her neck's warmth and all. Again
Moved the arrested magic; in his brain
Noises grew, and a light that turned to glare,
And greater glare, until the intense flare
Engulfed him, shut the whole scene from his sense.
And when he woke 't was many a furlong thence,
At home; the sun shining his ruddy wont;
The customary birds'-chirp; but his front
Was crowned—was crowned! Her scented scarf around
His neck! Whose gorgeous vesture heaps the ground?
A prize? He turned, and peeringly on him
Brooded the women-faces, kind and dim,
Ready to talk—"The Jongleurs in a troop
"Had brought him back, Naddo and Squarcialupe
"And Tagliafer; how strange! a childhood spent

“In taking, well for him, so brave a bent !
 “Since Eglamor,” they heard, “was dead with spite,
 “And Palma chose him for her minstrel.”

Light

Sordello rose—to think, now ; hitherto
 He had perceived. Sure, a discovery grew
 Out of it all ! Best live from first to last
 The transport o’er again. A week he passed,
 Sucking the sweet out of each circumstance,
 From the bard’s outbreak to the luscious trance
 Bounding his own achievement. Strange ! A man
 Recounted an adventure, but began
 Imperfectly ; his own task was to fill
 The frame-work up, sing well what he sung ill,
 Supply the necessary points, set loose
 As many incidents of little use
 —More imbecile the other, not to see
 Their relative importance clear as he !
 But, for a special pleasure in the act
 Of singing—had he ever turned, in fact,
 From Elys, to sing Elys ?—from each fit
 Of rapture to contrive a song of it ?
 True, this snatch or the other seemed to wind
 Into a treasure, helped himself to find
 A beauty in himself ; for, see, he soared
 By means of that mere snatch, to many a hoard

Of fancies ; as some falling cone bears soft
The eye along the fir-tree-spire, aloft
To a dove's nest. Then, how divine the cause
Why such performance should exact applause
From men, if they had fancies too ? Did fate
Decree they found a beauty separate
In the poor snatch itself ?—"Take Elys, there,
"—' Her head that 's sharp and perfect like a pear,
" 'So close and smooth are laid the few fine locks
" 'Coloured like honey oozed from topmost rocks
" 'Sun-blanch'd the livelong summer'—if they heard
" Just those two rhymes, assented at my word,
" And loved them as I love them who have run
" These fingers through those pale locks, let the sun
" Into the white cool skin—who first could clutch,
" Then praise—I needs must be a god to such.
" Or what if some, above themselves, and yet
" Beneath me, like their Eglamor, have set
" An impress on our gift ? So, men believe
" And worship what they know not, nor receive
" Delight from. Have they fancies—slow, perchance,
" Not at their beck, which indistinctly glance
" Until, by song, each floating part be linked
" To each, and all grow palpable, distinct ?"
He pondered this.

Meanwhile, sounds low and drear

Stole on him, and a noise of footsteps, near
And nearer, while the underwood was pushed
Aside, the larches grazed, the dead leaves crushed
At the approach of men. The wind seemed laid ;
Only, the trees shrunk slightly and a shade
Came o'er the sky although 't was midday yet :
You saw each half-shut downcast floweret
Flutter—"a Roman bride, when they 'd dispart
"Her unbound tresses with the Sabine dart,
"Holding that famous rape in memory still,
"Felt creep into her curls the iron chill,
"And looked thus," Eglamor would say—indeed
'T is Eglamor, no other, these precede
Home hither in the woods. "'T were surely sweet
"Far from the scene of one's forlorn defeat
"To sleep !" judged Naddo, who in person led
Jongleurs and Trouveres, chanting at their head,
A scanty company ; for, sooth to say,
Our beaten Troubadour had seen his day.
Old worshippers were something shamed, old friends
Nigh weary ; still the death proposed amends.
"Let us but get them safely through my song
"And home again !" quoth Naddo.
All along,
This man (they rest the bier upon the sand)
—This calm corpse with the loose flowers in his hand,

Eglamor, lived Sordello's opposite.
For him indeed was Naddo's notion right,
And verse a temple-worship vague and vast,
A ceremony that withdrew the last
Opposing bolt, looped back the lingering veil
Which hid the holy place : should one so frail
Stand there without such effort? or repine
If much was blank, uncertain at the shrine
He knelt before, till, soothed by many a rite,
The power responded, and some sound or sight
Grew up, his own forever, to be fixed,
In rhyme, the beautiful, forever !—mixed
With his own life, unloosed when he should please,
Having it safe at hand, ready to ease
All pain, remove all trouble ; every time
He loosed that fancy from its bonds of rhyme,
(Like Perseus when he loosed his naked love)
Faltering ; so distinct and far above
Himself, these fancies ! He, no genius rare,
Transfiguring in fire or wave or air
At will, but a poor gnome that, cloistered up
In some rock-chamber with his agate cup,
His topaz rod, his seed-pearl, in these few
And their arrangement finds enough to do
For his best art. Then, how he loved that art !
The calling marking him a man apart

From men—one not to care, take counsel for
Cold hearts, comfortless faces—(Eglamor
Was neediest of his tribe)—since verse, the gift,
Was his, and men, the whole of them, must shift
Without it, e'en content themselves with wealth
And pomp and power, snatching a life by stealth.
So, Eglamor was not without his pride !
The sorriest bat which cowers throughout noontide
While other birds are jocund, has one time
When moon and stars are blinded, and the prime
Of earth is his to claim, nor find a peer ;
And Eglamor was noblest poet here—
He well knew, 'mid those April woods he cast
Conceits upon in plenty as he passed,
That Naddo might suppose him not to think
Entirely on the coming triumph : wink
At the one weakness ! 'T was a fervid child,
That song of his ; no brother of the guild
Had e'er conceived its like. The rest you know,
The exaltation and the overthrow :
Our poet lost his purpose, lost his rank,
His life—to that it came. Yet envy sank
Within him, as he heard Sordello out,
And, for the first time, shouted—tried to shout
Like others, not from any zeal to show
Pleasure that way : the common sort did so,

What else was Eglamor? who, bending down
As they, placed his beneath Sordello's crown,
Printed a kiss on his successor's hand,
Left one great tear on it, then joined his band
—In time, for some were watching at the door:
Who knows what envy may effect? “Give o'er,
“Nor charm his lips, nor craze him!” (here one spied
And disengaged the withered crown)—“Beside
“His crown? How prompt and clear those verses rang
“To answer yours! nay, sing them!” And he sang
Them calmly. Home he went; friends used to wait
His coming, zealous to congratulate;
But, to a man—so quickly runs report—
Could do no less than leave him, and escort
His rival. That eve, then, bred many a thought:
What must his future life be? was he brought
So low, who stood so lofty this Spring morn?
At length he said, “Best sleep now with my corn,
“And by to-morrow I devise some plain
“Expedient!” So, he slept, nor woke again.
They found as much, those friends, when they returned
O'erflowing with the marvels they had learned
About Sordello's paradise, his roves
Among the hills and vales and plains and groves,
Wherein, no doubt, this lay was roughly cast,
Polished by slow degrees, completed last
To Eglamor's discomfiture and death.

Such form the chanters now, and, out of breath,
They lay the beaten man in his abode,
Naddo reciting that same luckless ode,
Doleful to hear. Sordello could explore
By means of it, however, one step more
In joy ; and, mastering the round at length,
Learnt how to live in weakness as in strength,
When from his covert forth he stood, addressed
Eglamor, bade the tender ferns invest,
Primæval pines o'ercanopy his couch,
And, most of all, his fame—(shall I avouch
Eglamor heard it, dead though he might look,
And laughed as from his brow Sordello took
The crown, and laid on the bard's breast, and said
It was a crown, now, fit for poet's head?)
—Continue. Nor the prayer quite fruitless fell.
A plant they have, yielding a three-leaved bell
Which whitens at the heart ere noon, and ails
Till evening ; evening gives it to her gales
To clear away with such forgotten things
As are an eyesore to the morn : this brings
Him to their mind, and bears his very name.

So much for Eglamor. My own month came ;
'T was a sunrise of blossoming and May.
Beneath a flowering laurel thicket lay
Sordello ; each new sprinkle of white stars

That smell fainter of wine than Massic jars
Dug up at Baiæ, when the south wind shed
The ripest, made him happier ; filleted
And robed the same, only a lute beside
Lay on the turf. Before him far and wide
The country stretched · Goito slept behind
—The castle and its covert, which confined
Him with his hopes and fears ; so fain of old
To leave the story of his birth untold.
At intervals, 'spite the fantastic glow
Of his Apollo-life, a certain low
And wretched whisper, winding through the bliss,
Admonished, no such fortune could be his,
All was quite false and sure to fade one day :
The closelier drew he round him his array
Of brilliance to expel the truth. But when
A reason for his difference from men
Surprised him at the grave, he took no rest
While aught of that old life, superbly dressed
Down to its meanest incident, remained
A mystery . alas, they soon explained
Away Apollo ! and the tale amounts
To this : when at Vicenza both her counts
Banished the Vivaresi kith and kin,
Those Maltraversi hung on Ecelin,
Reviled him as he followed ; he for spite

Must fire their quarter, though that self-same night
Among the flames young Ecelin was born
Of Adelaide, there too, and barely torn
From the roused populace hard on the rear,
By a poor archer when his chieftain's fear
Grew high ; into the thick Elcorte leapt,
Saved her, and died ; no creature left except
His child to thank. And when the full escape
Was known—how men impaled from chine to nape
Unlucky Prata, all to pieces spurned
Bishop Pistore's concubines, and burned .
Taurello's entire household, flesh and fell,
Missing the sweeter prey—such courage well .
Might claim reward. The orphan, ever since,
Sordello, had been nurtured by his prince
Within a blind retreat where Adelaide—
(For, once this notable discovery made,
The past at every point was understood)
—Might harbour easily when times were rude,
When Azzo schemed for Palma, to retrieve
That pledge of Agnes Este—loth to leave
Mantua unguarded with a vigilant eye,
While there Taurello bode ambiguously—
He who could have no motive now to moil
For his own fortunes since their utter spoil—
As it were worth while yet (went the report)

To disengage himself from her. In short,
Apollo vanished ; a mean youth, just named
His lady's minstrel, was to be proclaimed
—How shall I phrase it?—Monarch of the World !
For, on the day when that array was furled
Forever, and in place of one a slave
To longings, wild indeed, but longings save
In dreams as wild, suppressed—one daring not
Assume the mastery such dreams allot,
Until a magical equipment, strength,
Grace, wisdom, decked him too,—he chose at length,
Content with unproved wits and failing frame,
In virtue of his simple will, to claim
That mastery, no less—to do his best
With means so limited, and let the rest
Go by,—the seal was set : never again
Sordello could in his own sight remain
One of the many, one with hopes and cares
And interests nowise distinct from theirs,
Only peculiar in a thriveless store
Of fancies, which were fancies and no more ;
Never again for him and for the crowd
A common law was challenged and allowed
If calmly reasoned of, howe'er denied
By a mad impulse nothing justified
Short of Apollo's presence. The divorce

Is clear: why needs Sordello square his course
By any known example? Men no more
Compete with him than tree and flower before.
Himself, inactive, yet is greater far
Than such as act, each stooping to his star,
Acquiring thence his function; he has gained
The same result with meaner mortals trained
To strength or beauty, moulded to express
Each the idea that rules him; since no less
He comprehends that function, but can still
Embrace the others, take of might his fill
With Richard as of grace with Palma, mix
Their qualities, or for a moment fix
On one; abiding free meantime, uncramped
By any partial organ, never stamped
Strong, and to strength turning all energies—
Wise, and restricted to becoming wise—
That is, he loves not, nor possesses One
Idea that, star-like over, lures him on
To its exclusive purpose. “Fortunate!
“This flesh of mine ne’er strove to emulate
“A soul so various—took no casual mould
“Of the first fancy and, contracted, cold,
“Clogged her forever—soul averse to change
“As flesh: whereas flesh leaves soul free to range,
“Remains itself a blank, cast into shade,

“Encumbers little, if it cannot aid.
“So, range, free soul!—who, by self-consciousness,
“The last drop of all beauty dost express—
“The grace of seeing grace, a quintessence
“For thee: while for the world, that can dispense
“Wonder on men who, themselves, wonder—make
“A shift to love a^d second-hand, and take
“For idols those who do but idolize,
“Themselves,—the world that counts men strong or wise,
“Who, themselves, court strength, wisdom,—it shall
 bow
“Surely in unexampled worship now,
“Discerning me!”—

 (Dear monarch, I beseech,
Notice how lamentably wide a breach
Is here: discovering this, discover too
What our poor world has possibly to do
With it! As pigmy natures as you please—
So much the better for you; take your ease,
Look on, and laugh; style yourself God alone;
Strangle some day with a cross olive-stone!
All that is right enough: but why want us
To know that you yourself know thus and thus?)
“The world shall bow to me conceiving all
“Man’s life, who see its blisses, great and small,
“Afar—not tasting any; no machine

“ To exercise my utmost will is mine :
“ Be mine mere consciousness ! Let men perceive
“ What I could do, a mastery believe,
“ Asserted and established to the throng
“ By their selected evidence of song
“ Which now shall prove, whate’er they are, or seek
“ To be, I am—whose words, not actions speak,
“ Who change no standards of perfection, vex
“ With no strange forms created to perplex,
“ But just perform their bidding and no more,
“ At their own satiating-point give o’er,
“ While each shall love in me the love that leads
“ His soul to power’s perfection.” Song, not deeds,
(For we get tired) was chosen. Fate would brook
Mankind no other organ ; he would look
For not another channel to dispense
His own volition by, receive men’s sense
Of its supremacy—would live content,
Obstructed else, with merely verse for vent.
Nor should, for instance, strength an outlet seek
And, striving, be admired : nor grace bespeak
Wonder, displayed in gracious attitudes :
Nor wisdom, poured forth, change unseemly moods ;
But he would give and take on song’s one point.
Like some huge throbbing stone that, poised a-joint,
Sounds, to affect on its basaltic bed,

Must sue in just one accent ; tempests shed
Thunder, and raves the windstorm : only let
That key by any little noise be set—
The far benighted hunter's halloo pitch
On that, the hungry curlew chance to scritch
Or serpent hiss it, rustling through the rift,
However loud, however low—all lift
The groaning monster, stricken to the heart.

Lo ye, the world's concernment, for its part,
And this, for his, will hardly interfere !
Its businesses in blood and blaze this year
But wile the hour away—a pastime slight
Till he shall step upon the platform : right !
And, now thus much is settled, cast in rough,
Proved feasible, be counselled ! thought enough,—
Slumber, Sordello ! any day will serve :
Were it a less digested plan ! how swerve
To-morrow ? Meanwhile eat these sun-dried grapes,
And watch the soaring hawk there ! Life escapes
Merrily thus.

He thoroughly read o'er
His truchman Naddo's missive six times more,
Praying him visit Mantua and supply
A famished world.

The evening star was high
When he reached Mantua, but his fame arrived

Before him : friends applauded, foes connived,
And Naddo looked an angel, and the rest
Angels, and all these angels would be blest
Supremely by a song—the thrice-renowned
Goito-manufacture. Then he found
(Casting about to satisfy the crowd)
That happy vehicle, so late allowed,
A sore annoyance ; 't was the song's effect
He cared for, scarce the song itself : reflect !
In the past life, what might be singing's use?
Just to delight his Delians, whose profuse
Praise, not the toilsome process which procured
That praise, enticed Apollo : dreams abjured,
No overleaping means for ends—take both
For granted or take neither ! I am loth
To say the rhymes at last were Eglamor's ;
But Naddo, chuckling, bade competitors
Go pine ; “ the master certes meant to waste
“ No effort, cautiously had probed the taste
“ He 'd please anon : true bard, in short,—disturb
“ His title if they could ; nor spur nor curb,
“ Fancy nor reason, wanting in him ; whence
“ The staple of his verses, common sense :
“ He built on man's broad nature—gift of gifts,
“ That power to build ! The world contented shifts
“ With counterfeits enough, a dreary sort

“ Of warriors, statesmen, ere it can extort
“ Its poet-soul—that ’s, after all, a freak
“ (The having eyes to see and tongue to speak)
“ With our herd’s stupid sterling happiness
“ So plainly incompatible that—yes—
“ Yes—should a son of his improve the breed
“ And turn out poet, he were cursed indeed !”
“ Well, there ’s Goito and its woods anon,
“ If the worst happen ; best go stoutly on
“ Now !” thought Sordello.

Ay, and goes on yet !

You pother with your glossaries to get
A notion of the Troubadour’s intent
In rondel, tenzon, virlai or sirvent—
Much as you study arras how to twirl
His angelot, plaything of page and girl
Once ; but you surely reach, at last,—or, no !
Never quite reach what struck the people so,
As from the welter of their time he drew
Its elements successively to view,
Followed all actions backward on their course,
And catching up, unmingled at the source,
Such a strength, such a weakness, added then
A touch or two, and turned them into men.
Virtue took form, nor vice refused a shape ;
Here heaven opened, there was hell agape,

As Saint this simpered past in sanctity,
Sinner the other flared portentous by
A greedy people. Then why stop, surprised
At his success? The scheme was realized
Too suddenly in one respect: a crowd
Praising, eyes quick to see, and lips as loud
To speak, delicious homage to receive,
The woman's breath to feel upon his sleeve,
Who said, "But Anafest—why asks he less
"Than Lucio, in your verses? how confess,
"It seemed too much but yestereve!"—the youth,
Who bade him earnestly, "Avow the truth!
"You love Bianca, surely, from your song;
"I knew I was unworthy!"—soft or strong,
In poured such tributes ere he had arranged
Ethereal ways to take them, sorted, changed,
Digested. Courted thus at unawares,
In spite of his pretensions and his cares,
He caught himself shamefully hankering
After the obvious petty joys that spring
From true life, fain relinquish pedestal
And condescend with pleasures—one and all
To be renounced, no doubt; for, thus to chain
Himself to single joys and so refrain
From tasting their quintessence, frustrates, sure,
His prime design; each joy must he abjure
Even for love of it.

He laughed : what sage
But perishes if from his magic page
He look because, at the first line, a proof
'T was heard salutes him from the cavern roof?
"On! Give yourself, excluding aught beside,
"To the day's task ; compel your slave provide
"Its utmost at the soonest ; turn the leaf
"Thoroughly conned. These lays of yours, in brief—
"Cannot men bear, now, something better?—fly
"A pitch beyond this unreal pageantry
"Of essences? the period sure has ceased
"For such : present us with ourselves, at least,
"Not portions of ourselves, mere loves and hates
"Made flesh : wait not !"

Awhile the poet waits
However. The first trial was enough :
He left imagining, to try the stuff
That held the imaged thing, and, let it writhe
Never so fiercely, scarce allowed a tithe
To reach the light—his Language. How he sought
The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought
That Language,—welding words into the crude
Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude
Armour was hammered out, in time to be
Approved beyond the Roman panoply
Melted to make it,—boots not. This obtained

With some ado, no obstacle remained
To using it ; accordingly he took
An action with its actors, quite forsook
Himself to live in each, returned anon
With the result—a creature, and, by one
And one, proceeded leisurely to equip
Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.
“ Accomplished ! Listen, Mantuans ! ” Fond essay !
Piece after piece that armour broke away,
Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
As language : thought may take perception’s place
But hardly co-exist in any case,
Being its mere presentment—of the whole
By parts, the simultaneous and the sole
By the successive and the many. Lacks
The crowd perception ? painfully it tacks
Thought to thought, which Sordello, needing such,
Has rent perception into : it’s to clutch
And reconstruct—his office to diffuse,
Destroy : as hard, then, to obtain a Muse
As to become Apollo. “ For the rest,
“ E’en if some wondrous vehicle expressed
“ The whole dream, what impertinence in me
“ So to express it, who myself can be
“ The dream ! nor, on the other hand, are those

"I sing to, over-likely to suppose
"A higher than the highest I present
"Now, which they praise already : be content
"Both parties, rather—they with the old verse,
"And I with the old praise—far go, fare worse !"
A few adhering rivets loosed, upsprings
The angel, sparkles off his mail, which rings
Whirled from each delicatest limb it warps ;
So might Apollo from the sudden corpse
Of Hyacinth have cast his luckless quoits.
He set to celebrating the exploits
Of Montfort o'er the Mountaineers.

Then came
The world's revenge : their pleasure, now his aim
Merely,—what was it? "Not to play the fool
"So much as learn our lesson in your school !"
Replied the world. He found that, every time
He gained applause by any ballad-rhyme,
His auditory recognized no jot
As he intended, and, mistaking not
Him for his meanest hero, ne'er was dunce
Sufficient to believe him—all, at once.
His will . . . conceive it caring for his will !
—Mantuans, the main of them, admiring still
How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak,
Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)

His fingers' ends ; while past the praise-tide swept
To Montfort, either's share distinctly kept :
The true meed for true merit !—his abates
Into a sort he most repudiates,
And on them angrily he turns. Who were
The Mantuans, after all, that he should care
About their recognition, ay or no ?
In spite of the convention months ago,
(Why blink the truth?) was not he forced to help
This same ungrateful audience, every whelp
Of Naddo's litter, make them pass for peers
With the bright band of old Goito years,
As erst he toiled for flower or tree? Why, there
Sat Palma ! Adelaide's funereal hair
Ennobled the next corner. Ay, he strewed
A fairy dust upon that multitude,
Although he feigned to take them by themselves ;
His giants dignified those puny elves,
Sublimed their faint applause. In short, he found
Himself still footing a delusive round,
Remote as ever from the self-display
He meant to compass, hampered every way
By what he hoped assistance. Wherefore then
Continue, make believe to find in men
A use he found not?

Weeks, months, years went by

And lo, Sordello vanished utterly,
Sundered in twain ; each spectral part at strife
With each ; one jarred against another life ;
The Poet thwarting hopelessly the Man—
Who, fooled no longer, free in fancy ran
Here, there : let slip no opportunities
As pitiful, forsooth³, beside the prize
To drop on him some no-time and acquit
His constant faith (the Poet-half's to wit—
That waiving any compromise between
No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen
Beyond most methods)—of incurring scoff
From the Man-portion—not to be put off
With self-reflectings by the Poet's scheme,
Though ne'er so bright. Who sauntered forth in dream,
Dressed any how, nor waited mystic frames,
Immeasurable gifts, astounding claims,
But just his sorry self?—who yet might be
Sorrier for aught he in reality
Achieved, so pinioned Man's the Poet-part,
Fondling, in turn of fancy, verse ; the Art
Developing his soul a thousand ways—
Potent, by its assistance, to amaze
The multitude with majesties, convince
Each sort of nature that the nature's prince
Accosted it. Language, the makeshift, grew

Into a bravest of expedients, too ;
Apollo, seemed it now, perverse had thrown
Quiver and bow away, the lyre alone
Sufficed. While, out of dream, his day's work went
To tune a crazy tenzon or sirvent—
So hampered him the Man-part, thrust to judge
Between the bard and the bard's audience, grudge
A minute's toil that missed its due reward !
But the complete Sordello, Man and Bard,
John's cloud-girt angel, this foot on the land,
That on the sea, with, open in his hand,
A bitter-sweetling of a book—was gone.

Then, if internal struggles to be one,
Which frittered him incessantly piecemeal,
Referred, ne'er so obliquely, to the real
Intruding Mantuans ! ever with some call
To action while he pondered, once for all,
Which looked the easier effort—to pursue
This course, still leap o'er paltry joys, yearn through
The present ill-appreciated stage
Of self-revelment, and compel the age
Know him—or else, forswearing bard-craft, wake
From out his lethargy and nobly shake
Off timid habits of denial, mix
With men, enjoy like men. Ere he could fix
On aught, in rushed the Mantuans ; much they cared

For his perplexity ! Thus unprepared,
The obvious if not only shelter lay
In deeds, the dull conventions of his day
Prescribed the like of him : why not be glad
'T is settled Palma's minstrel, good or bad,
Submits to this and that established rule?
Let Vidal change, or any other fool,
His murrey-coloured robe for filamot,
And crop his hair ; too skin-deep, is it not,
Such vigour? Then, a sorrow to the heart,
His talk ! Whatever topics they might start
Had to be groped for in his consciousness
Straight, and as straight delivered them by guess.
Only obliged to ask himself, " What was,"
A speedy answer followed ; but, alas,
One of God's large ones, tardy to condense
Itself into a period ; answers whence
A tangle of conclusions must be stripped
At any risk ere, trim to pattern clipped,
They matched rare specimens the Mantuan flock
Regaled him with, each talker from his stock
Of sorted-o'er opinions, every stage,
Juicy in youth or desiccate with age,
Fruits like the fig-tree's, rathe-ripe, rotten-rich,
Sweet-sour, all tastes to take : a practice which
He too had not impossibly attained,

Once either of those fancy-flights restrained ;
(For, at conjecture how might words appear
To others, playing there what happened here,
And occupied abroad by what he spurned
At home, 't was slipped, the occasion he returned
To seize :) he 'd strike that lyre adroitly—speech,
Would but a twenty-cubit plectre reach ;
A clever hand, consummate instrument,
Were both brought close ; each excellency went
For nothing, else. The question Naddo asked,
Had just a lifetime moderately tasked
To answer, Naddo's fashion. More disgust
And more : why move his soul, since move it must
At minute's notice or as good it failed
To move at all? The end was, he retailed
Some ready-made opinion, put to use
This quip, that maxim, ventured reproduce
Gestures and tones—at any folly caught
Serving to finish with, nor too much sought
If false or true 't was spoken ; praise and blame
Of what he said grew pretty nigh the same
—Meantime awards to meantime acts : his soul,
Unequal to the compassing a whole,
Saw, in a tenth part, less and less to strive
About. And as for men in turn . . . contrive
Who could to take eternal interest

In them, so hate the worst, so love the best,
 Though, in pursuance of his passive plan,
 He hailed, decried, the proper way.

As Man

So figured he ; and how as Poet? Verse
 Came only not to a stand-still. The worse,
 That his poor piece of daily work to do
 Was—not sink under any rivals ; who
 Loudly and long enough, without these qualms,
 Turned, from Bocafoli's stark-naked psalms,
 To Plara's sonnets spoilt by toying with,
 "As knops that stud some almug to the pith
 "Prickèd for gum, wry thence, and crinklèd worse
 "Than pursèd eyelids of a river-horse
 "Sunning himself o' the slime when whirrs the breese"—
Gad-fly, that is. He might compete with these !
 But—but—

"Observe a pompion-twine afloat ;
 "Pluck me one cup from off the castle-moat !
 "Along with cup you raise leaf, stalk and root,
 "The entire surface of the pool to boot.
 "So could I pluck a cup, put in one song
 "A single sight, did not my hand, too strong,
 "Twitch in the least the root-strings of the whole.
 "How should externals satisfy my soul?"
 "Why that 's precise the error Squarcialupe"

(Hazarded Naddo) "finds ; ' the man can't stoop
" 'To sing us out,' quoth he, ' a mere romance ;
" ' He 'd fain do better than the best, enhance
" ' The subjects' rarity, work problems out
" ' Therewith.' Now, you 're a bard, a bard past doubt,
" And no philosopher ; why introduce
" Crotchets like these? fine, surely, but no use
" In poetry—which still must be, to strike,
" Based upon common sense ; there 's nothing like
" Appealing to our nature ! what beside
" Was your first poetry? No tricks were tried
" In that, no hollow thrills, affected throes !
" ' The man,' said we, ' tells his own joys and woes :
" ' We 'll trust him.' Would you have your songs endure?
" Build on the human heart !—why, to be sure
" Yours is one sort of heart—but I mean theirs,
" Ours, every one's, the healthy heart one cares
" To build on ! Central peace, mother of strength,
" That 's father of . . . nay, go yourself that length,
" Ask those calm-hearted doers what they do
" When they have got their calm ! And is it true,
" Fire rankles at the heart of every globe?
" Perhaps. But these are matters one may probe
" Too deeply for poetic purposes :
" Rather select a theory that . . . yes,
" Laugh ! what does that prove?—stations you midway

“And saves some little o’er-refining. Nay,
“That ’s rank injustice done me ! I restrict
“The poet? Don’t I hold the poet picked
“Out of a host of warriors, statesmen . . . did
“I tell you? Very like ! As well you hid
“That sense of power, you have ! True bards believe
“All able to achieve what they achieve—
“That is, just nothing—in one point abide
“Profounder simpletons than all beside.
“Oh, ay ! The knowledge that you are a bard
“Must constitute your prime, nay sole, reward !”
So prattled Naddo, busiest of the tribe
Of genius-haunters—how shall I describe
What grubs or nips or rubs or rips—your louse
For love, your flea for hate, magnanimous,
Malignant, Pappacoda, Tagliafer,
Picking a sustenance from wear and tear
By implements it sedulous employs
To undertake, lay down, mete out, o’er-toise
Sordello? Fifty creepers to elude
At once ! They settled staunchly ; shame ensued :
Behold the monarch of mankind succumb
To the last fool who turned him round his thumb,
As Naddo styled it ! ’T was not worth oppose
The matter of a moment, gainsay those
He aimed at getting rid of ; better think

Their thoughts and speak their speech, secure to slink
Back expeditiously to his safe place,
And chew the cud—what he and what his race
Were really, each of them. Yet even this
Conformity was partial. He would miss
Some point, brought into contact with them ere
Assured in what small segment of the sphere
Of his existence they attended him ;
Whence blunders, falsehoods rectified—a grim
List—slur it over ! How ? If dreams were tried,
His will swayed sickly from side to side,
Nor merely neutralized his waking act
But tended e'en in fancy to distract
The intermediate will, the choice of means.
He lost the art of dreaming : Mantuan scenes
Supplied a baron, say, he sang before,
Handsomely reckless, full to running-o'er
Of gallantries ; “ abjure the soul, content
“ With body, therefore ! ” Scarcely had he bent
Himself in dream thus low, when matter fast
Cried out, he found, for spirit to contrast
And task it duly ; by advances slight,
The simple stuff becoming composite,
Count Lori grew Apollo : best recall
His fancy ! Then would some rough peasant-Paul,
Like those old Ecelin confers with, glance

His gay apparel o'er ; that countenance
Gathered his shattered fancies into one,
And, body clean abolished, soul alone
Sufficed the grey Paulician : by and by,
To balance the ethereality,
Passions were needed ; foiled he sank again.

Meanwhile the world rejoiced ('t is time explain)
Because a sudden sickness set it free
From Adelaide. Missing the mother-bee,
Her mountain-hive Romano swarmed ; at once
A rustle-forth of daughters and of sons
Blackened the valley. "I am sick too, old,
"Half-crazed I think ; what good 's the Kaiser's gold
"To such an one? God help me! for I catch
"My children's greedy sparkling eyes at watch—
" 'He bears that double breastplate on,' they say,
" 'So many minutes less than yesterday !'
"Beside, Monk Hilary is on his knees
"Now, sworn to kneel and pray till God shall please
"Exact a punishment for many things
"You know, and some you never knew ; which brings
"To memory, Azzo's sister Beatrix
"And Richard's Giglia are my Alberic's
"And Ecelin's betrothed ; the Count himself
"Must get my Palma : Ghibellin and Guelf
"Mean to embrace each other." So began

Romano's missive to his fighting man
Taurello—on the Tuscan's death, away
With Friedrich sworn to sail from Naples' bay
Next month for Syria. Never thunder-clap
Out of Vesuvius' throat, like this mishap
Startled him. "That accursed Vicenza! I
"Absent, and she selects this time to die!
"Ho, fellows, for Vicenza!" Half a score
Of horses ridden dead, he stood before
Romano in his reeking spurs: too late—
"Boniface urged me, Este could not wait,"
The chieftain stammered; "let me die in peace—
"Forget me! Was it I who craved increase
"Of rule? Do you and Friedrich plot your worst
"Against the Father: as you found me first
"So leave me now. Forgive me! Palma, sure,
"Is at Goito still. Retain that lure—
"Only be pacified!"

The country rung
With such a piece of news: on every tongue,
How Ecelin's great servant, congeed off,
Had done a long day's service, so, might doff
The green and yellow, and recover breath
At Mantua, whither,—since Retrude's death,
(The girlish slip of a Sicilian bride
From Otho's house, he carried to reside

At Mantua till the Ferrarese should pile
A structure worthy her imperial style,
The gardens raise, the statues there enshrine,
She never lived to see)—although his line
Was ancient in her archives and she took
A pride in him, that city, nor forsook
Her child when he forsook himself and spent
A prowess on Romano surely meant
For his own growth—whither he ne'er resorts
If wholly satisfied (to trust reports)
With Ecelin. So, forward in a trice
Were shows to greet him. "Take a friend's advice,"
Quoth Naddo to Sordello, "nor be rash
"Because your rivals (nothing can abash
"Some folks) demur that we pronounced you best
"To sound the great man's welcome; 't is a test,
"Remember! Strojavacca looks asquint,
"The rough fat sloven; and there 's plenty hint
"Your pinions have received of late a shock—
"Outsoar them, cobswan of the silver flock!
"Sing well!" A signal wonder, song 's no whit
Facilitated.

Fast the minutes flit;
Another day, Sordello finds, will bring
The soldier, and he cannot choose but sing;
So, a last shift, quits Mantua—slow, alone:

Out of that aching brain, a very stone,
Song must be struck. What occupies that front?
Just how he was more awkward than his wont
The night before, when Naddo, who had seen
Taurello on his progress, praised the mien
For dignity no crosses could affect—
Such was a joy, and might not he detect
A satisfaction if established joys
Were proved imposture? Poetry annoys
Its utmost : wherefore fret? Verses may come
Or keep away ! And thus he wandered, dumb
Till evening, when he paused, thoroughly spent,
On a blind hill-top : down the gorge he went,
Yielding himself up as to an embrace.
The moon came out ; like features of a face,
A querulous fraternity of pines,
Sad blackthorn clumps, leafless and grovelling vines
Also came out, made gradually up
The picture ; 't was Goito's mountain-cup
And castle. He had dropped through one defile
He never dared explore, the Chief erewhile
Had vanished by. Back rushed the dream, enwrapped
Him wholly. 'T was Apollo now they lapped,
Those mountains, not a pettish minstrel meant
To wear his soul away in discontent,
Brooding on fortune's malice. Heart and brain

Swelled ; he expanded to himself again,
As some thin seedling spice-tree starved and frail,
Pushing between cat's head and ibis' tail
Crusted into the porphyry pavement smooth,
—Suffered remain just as it sprung, to soothe
The Soldan's pining daughter, never yet
Well in her chilly green-glazed minaret,—
When rooted up, the sunny day she died,
And flung into the common court beside
Its parent tree. Come home, Sordello ! Soon
Was he low muttering, beneath the moon,
Of sorrow saved, of quiet evermore,—
Since from the purpose, he maintained before,
Only resulted wailing and hot tears.
Ah, the slim castle ! dwindled of late years,
But more mysterious ; gone to ruin—trails
Of vine through every loop-hole. Nought avails
The night as, torch in hand, he must explore
The maple chamber : did I say, its floor
Was made of intersecting cedar beams?
Worn now with gaps so large, there blew cold
streams
Of air quite from the dungeon ; lay your ear
Close and 't is like, one after one, you hear
In the blind darkness water drop. The nests
And nooks retain their long ranged vesture-chests

Empty and smelling of the iris root
The Tuscan grated o'er them to recruit
Her wasted wits. Palma was gone that day,
Said the remaining women. Last, he lay
Beside the Carian group reserved and still.

The Body, the Machine for Acting Will,
Had been at the commencement prov'd unfit ;
That for Demonstrating, Reflecting it,
Mankind—no fitter : was the Will Itself
In fault?

His forehead pressed the moonlit shelf
Beside the youngest marble maid awhile ;
Then, raising it, he thought, with a long smile,
"I shall be king again !" as he withdrew
The envied scarf ; into the font he threw
His crown

Next day, no poet ! "Wherefore?" asked
Taurello, when the dance of Jongleurs, masked
As devils, ended ; "don't a song come next?"
The master of the pageant looked perplexed
Till Naddo's whisper came to his relief.
"His Highness knew what poets were : in brief,
"Had not the tetchy race prescriptive right
"To peevishness, caprice? or, call it spite,
"One must receive their nature in its length
"And breadth, expect the weakness with the strength !"

—So phrasing, till, his stock of phrases spent,
The easy-natured soldier smiled assent,
Settled his portly person, smoothed his chin,
And nodded that the bull-bait might begin.

BOOK THE THIRD.
✱

AND the font took them : let our laurels lie !
Braid moonfern now with mystic trifoly
Because once more Goito gets, once more,
Sordello to itself ! A dream is o'er,
And the suspended life begins anew ;
Quiet those throbbing temples, then, subdue
That cheek's distortion ! Nature's strict embrace,
Putting aside the past, shall soon efface
Its print as well—factitious humours grown
Over the true—loves, hatreds not his own—
And turn him pure as some forgotten vest
Woven of painted byssus, silkiest
Tufting the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip,
Left welter where a trireme let it slip
I' the sea, and vexed a satrap ; so the stain
O' the world forsakes Sordello, with its pain,
Its pleasure : how the tinct loosening escapes,
Cloud after cloud ! Mantua's familiar shapes

Die, fair and foul die, fading as they flit,
 Men, women, and the pathos and the wit,
 Wise speech and foolish, deeds to smile or sigh
 For, good, bad, seemly or ignoble, die.
 The last face glances through the eglantines,
 The last voice murmurs, 'twixt the blossomed vines,
 Of Men, of that machine supplied by thought
 To compass self-perception with, he sought
 By forcing half himself—an insane pulse
 Of a god's blood, on clay it could convulse,
 Never transmute—on human sights and sounds,
 To watch the other half with ; irksome bounds
 It ebbs from to its source, a fountain sealed
 Forever. Better sure be unrevealed
 Than part revealed : Sordello well or ill
 Is finished : then what further use of Will,
 Point in the prime idea not realized,
 An oversight? inordinately prized,
 No less, and pampered with enough of each
 Delight to prove the whole above its reach.
 "To need become all natures, yet retain
 "The law of my own nature—to remain
 "Myself, yet yearn . . . as if that chestnut, think,
 "Should yearn for this first larch-bloom crisp and pink,
 "Or those pale fragrant tears where zephyrs stanch
 "March wounds along the fretted pine-tree branch !

“ Will and the means to show will, great and small,
“ Material, spiritual,—abjure them all
“ Save any so distinct, they may be left
“ To amuse, not tempt become ! and, thus bereft,
“ Just as I first was fashioned would I be !
“ Nor, moon, is it Apollo now, but me
“ Thou visitest to comfort and befriend !
“ Swim thou into my heart, and there an end,
“ Since I possess thee !—nay, thus shut mine eyes
“ And know, quite know, by this heart’s fall and rise,
“ When thou dost bury thee in clouds, and when
“ Out-standest : wherefore practise upon men
“ To make that plainer to myself ?”

Slide here

Over a sweet and solitary year
Wasted ; or simply notice change in him—
How eyes, once with exploring bright, grew dim
And satiate with receiving. Some distress
Was caused, too, by a sort of consciousness
Under the imbecility,—nought kept
That down ; he slept, but was aware he slept,
So, frustrated : as who brainsick made pact
Erst with the overhanging cataract
To deafen him, yet still distinguished plain
His own blood’s measured clicking at his brain.
To finish. One declining Autumn day—

Few birds about the heaven chill and grey,
No wind that cared trouble the tacit woods—
He sauntered home complacently, their moods
According, his and nature's. Every spark
Of Mantua life was trodden out ; so dark
The embers, that the Troubadour, who sung
Hundreds of songs, forgot, its trick his tongue,
Its craft his brain, how either brought to pass
Singing at all ; that faculty might class
With any of Apollo's now. The year
Began to find its early promise sere
As well. Thus beauty vanishes, thus stone
Outlingers flesh : nature's and his youth gone,
They left the world to you, and wished you joy.
When, stopping his benevolent employ,
A presage shuddered through the welkin ; harsh
The earth's remonstrance followed. 'T was the marsh
Gone of a sudden. Mincio, in its place,
Laughed, a broad water, in next morning's face,
And, where the mists broke up immense and white
I' the steady wind, burned like a spilth of light
Out of the crashing of a myriad stars.
And here was nature, bound by the same bars
Of fate with him !

“ No ! youth once gone is gone :
“ Deeds, let escape, are never to be done.

“ Leaf-fall and grass-spring for the year ; for us—
“ Oh forfeit I unalterably thus
“ My chance? nor two lives wait me, this to spend,
“ Learning save that? Nature has time, may mend
“ Mistake, she knows occasion will recur ;
“ Landslip or seabreach, how affects it her
“ With her magnificent resources?—I
“ Must perish once and perish utterly.
“ Not any strollings now at even-close
“ Down the field-path, Sordello ! by thorn-rows
“ Alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire
“ And dew, outlining the black cypress’ spire
“ She waits you at, Elys, who heard you first
“ Woo her, the snow-month through, but ere she durst
“ Answer ’t was April. Linden-flower-time-long
“ Her eyes were on the ground ; ’t is July, strong
“ Now ; and because white dust-clouds overwhelm
“ The woodside, here or by the village elm
“ That holds the moon, she meets you, somewhat pale,
“ But letting you lift up her coarse flax veil
“ And whisper (the damp little hand in yours)
“ Of love, heart’s love, your heart’s love that endures
“ Till death. Tush ! No mad mixing with the rout
“ Of haggard ribalds wandering about
“ The hot torchlit wine-scented island-house
“ Where Friedrich holds his wickedest carouse,

“Parading,—to the gay Palermitans,
“Soft Messinese, dusk Saracenic clans
“Nuocera holds,—those tall grave dazzling Norse,
“High-cheeked, lank-haired, toothed whiter than the
 morse,
“Queens of the caves of jet stalactites,
“He sent his barks to fetch through icy seas,
“The blind night seas without a saving star,
“And here in snowy birdskin robes they are,
“Sordello !—here, mollitious alcoves gilt
“Superb as Byzant domes that devils built !
“—Ah, Byzant, there again ! no chance to go
“Ever like august cheery Dandolo,
“Worshipping hearts about him for a wall,
“Conducted, blind eyes, hundred years and all,
“Through vanquished Byzant where friends note for him
“What pillar, marble massive, sardius slim,
“’T were fittest he transport to Venice’ Square—
“Flattered and promised life to touch them there
“Soon, by those fervid sons of senators !
“No more lifes, deaths, loves, hatreds, peaces, wars !
“Ah, fragments of a whole ordained to be,
“Points in the life I waited ! what are ye
“But roundels of a ladder which appeared
“Awhile the very platform it was reared
“To lift me on?—that happiness I find

“Proofs of my faith in, even in the blind
“Instinct which bade forego you all unless
“Ye led me past yourselves. Ay, happiness
“Awaited me; the way life should be used
“Was to acquire, and deeds like you conduced
“To teach it by a self-revelment, deemed
“Life’s very use, so long! Whatever seemed
“Progress to that, was pleasure; aught that stayed
“My reaching it—no pleasure. I have laid
“The ladder down; I climb not; still, aloft
“The platform stretches! Bliss strong and soft,
“I dared not entertain, elude me; yet
“Never of what they promised could I get
“A glimpse till now! The common sort, the crowd,
“Exist, perceive; with Being are endowed,
“However slight, distinct from what they See,
“However bounded; Happiness must be,
“To feed the first by gleanings from the last,
“Attain its qualities, and slow or fast
“Become what they behold; such peace-in-strife,
“By transmutation, is the Use of Life,
“The Alien turning Native to the soul
“Or body—which instructs me; I am whole
“There and demand a Palma; had the world
“Been from my soul to a like distance hurled,
“’T were Happiness to make it one with me:

"Whereas I must, ere I begin to Be,
 "Include a world, in flesh, I comprehend
 "In spirit now ; and this done, what 's to blend
 "With? Nought is Alien in the world—my Will
 "Owns all already ; yet can turn it—still
 "Less—Native, since my Means to correspond
 "With Will are so unworthy, 't was my bond
 "To tread the very joys that tantalize
 "Most now, into a grave, never to rise.
 "I die then ! Will the rest agree to die?
 "Next Age or no? Shall its Sordello try
 "Clue after clue, and catch at last the clue
 "I miss?—that 's underneath my finger too,
 "Twice, thrice a day, perhaps,—some yearning traced
 "Deeper, some petty consequence embraced
 "Closer ! Why fled I Mantua, then?—complained
 "So much my Will was fettered, yet remained
 "Content within a tether half the range
 "I could assign it?—able to exchange
 "My ignorance (I felt) for knowledge, and
 "Idle because I could thus understand—
 "Could e'en have penetrated to its core
 "Our mortal mystery, yet—fool—forbore,
 "Preferred elaborating in the dark
 "My casual stuff, by any wretched spark
 "Born of my predecessors, though one stroke

“Of mine had brought the flame forth! Mantua’s yoke,
“My minstrel’s-trade, was to behold mankind,—
“My own concern was just to bring my mind
“Behold, just extricate, for my acquit,
“Each object suffered stifle in the mist
“Which hazard, custom, blindness interpose
“Betwixt things and myself.” •

Whereat he rose.

The level wind carried above the firs
Clouds, the irrevocable travellers,
Onward.

“Pushed thus into a drowsy copse,
“Arms twine about my neck, each eyelid drops
“Under a humid finger; while there fleets,
“Outside the screen, a pageant time repeats
“Never again! To be deposed, immured
“Clandestinely—still petted, still assured
“To govern were fatiguing work—the Sight
“Fleeting meanwhile! ’T is noontide: wreak ere night
“Somehow my will upon it, rather! Slake
“This thirst somehow, the poorest impress take
“That serves! A blasted bud displays you, torn,
“Faint rudiments of the full flower unborn;
“But who divines what glory coats o’erclasp
“Of the bulb dormant in the mummy’s grasp
“Taurello sent?” . . .

“Taurello? Palma sent
“Your Trouvere,” (Naddo interposing leant
Over the lost bard’s shoulder)—“and, believe,
“You cannot more reluctantly receive
“Than I pronounce her message: we depart
“Together. What avail a poet’s heart
“Verona’s pomps and gauds? five blades of grass
“Suffice him. News? Why, where your marish was,
“On its mud-banks smoke rises after smoke
“I’ the valley, like a spout of hell new-broke.
“Oh, the world’s tidings! small your thanks, I guess,
“For them. The father of our Patroness,
“Has played Taurello an astounding trick,
“Parts between Ecelin and Alberic
“His wealth and goes into a convent: both
“Wed Guelfs: the Count and Palma plighted troth
“A week since at Verona: and they want
“You doubtless to contrive the marriage-chant
“Ere Richard storms Ferrara.” Then was told
The tale from the beginning—how, made bold
By Salinguerra’s absence, Guelfs had burned
And pillaged till he unawares returned
To take revenge: how Azzo and his friend
Were doing their endeavour, how the end
O’ the siege was nigh, and how the Count, released
From further care, would with his marriage-feast

Inaugurate a new and better rule,
Absorbing thus Romano.

“Shall I school
“My master,” added Naddo, “and suggest
“How you may clothe in a poetic vest
“These doings, at Verona? Your response
“To Palma! Wherefore jest? “Depart at once?
“A good resolve! In truth, I hardly hoped
“So prompt an acquiescence. Have you groped
“Out wisdom in the wilds here?—thoughts may be
“Over-poetical for poetry.
“Pearl-white, you poets liken Palma’s neck;
“And yet what spoils an orient like some speck
“Of genuine white, turning its own white grey?
“You take me? Curse the cicala!”

One more day,
One eve—appears Verona! Many a group,
(You mind) instructed of the osprey’s swoop
On lynx and ounce, was gathering—Christendom
Sure to receive, whate’er the end was, from
The evening’s purpose cheer or detriment,
Since Friedrich only waited some event
Like this, of Ghibellins establishing
Themselves within Ferrara, ere, as King
Of Lombardy, he ’d glad descend there, wage
Old warfare with the Pontiff, disengage

His barons from the burghers, and restore
The rule of Charlemagne, broken of yore
By Hildebrand.

I' the palace, each by each,
Sordello sat and Palma : little speech
At first in that dim closet, face with face
(Despite the tumult in the market-place)
Exchanging quick low laughs : now would rush
Word upon word to meet a sudden flush,
A look left off, a shifting lips' surmise—
But for the most part their two histories
Ran best thro' the locked fingers and linked arms.
And so the night flew on with its alarms
Till in burst one of Palma's retinue ;
"Now, Lady !" gasped he. Then arose the two
And leaned into Verona's air, dead-still.
A balcony lay black beneath until
Out, 'mid a gush of torchfire, grey-haired men
Came on it and harangued the people : then
Sea-like that people surging to and fro
Shouted, "Hale forth the carroch—trumpets, ho,
"A flourish ! Run it in the ancient grooves !
"Back from the bell ! Hammer—that whom behoves
"May hear the League is up ! Peal—learn who list,
"Verona means not first of towns break tryst
"To-morrow with the League !"

Enough. Now turn—
Over the eastern cypresses : discern !
Is any beacon set a-glimmer ?

Rang
The air with shouts that overpowered the clang
Of the incessant carroch, even : “ Haste—
“ The candle ’s at the gateway ! ere it waste,
“ Each soldier stand beside it, armed to march
“ With Tiso Sampier through the eastern arch ! ”
Ferrara’s succoured, Palma !

Once again
They sat together ; some strange thing in train
To say, so difficult was Palma’s place
In taking, with a coy fastidious grace
Like the bird’s flutter ere it fix and feed.
But when she felt she held her friend indeed
Safe, she threw back her curls, began implant
Her lessons ; telling of another want
Goito’s quiet nourished than his own ;
Palma—to serve him—to be served, alone
Importing ; Agnes’ milk so neutralized
The blood of Ecelin. Nor be surprised
If, while Sordello fain had captive led
Nature, in dream was Palma subjected
To some out-soul, which dawned not though she pined
Delaying, till its advent, heart and mind

Their life. "How dared I let expand the force
" Within me, till some out-soul, whose resource
" It grew for, should direct it? Every law
" Of life, its every fitness, every flaw,
" Must One determine whose corporeal shape
" Would be no other than the prime escape
" And revelation to me of a Will
" Orb-like o'ershrouded and inscrutable
" Above, save at the point which, I should know,
" Shone that myself, my powers, might overflow
" So far, so much ; as now it signified
" Which earthly shape it henceforth chose my guide,
" Whose mortal lip selected to declare
" Its oracles, what fleshly garb would wear
" —The first of intimations, whom to love ;
" The next, how love him. Seemed that orb, above
" The castle-covert and the mountain-close,
" Slow in appearing ?—if beneath it rose
" Cravings, aversions,—did our green precinct
" Take pride in me, at unawares distinct
" With this or that endowment,—how, repressed
" At once, such jetting power shrank to the rest !
" Was I to have a chance touch spoil me, leave
" My spirit thence unfitted to receive
" The consummating spell?—that spell so near
" Moreover ! ' Waits he not the waking year?

“ ‘ His almond-blossoms must be honey-ripe
“ ‘ By this ; to welcome him, fresh runnels stripe
“ ‘ The thawed ravines ; because of him, the wind
“ ‘ Walks like a herald. I shall surely find
“ ‘ Him now !’

“ And chief, that earnest April morn
“ Of Richard’s Love-court, was it time, so worn
“ And white my cheek, so idly my blood beat,
“ Sitting that morn beside the Lady’s feet
“ And saying as she prompted ; till outburst
“ One face from all the faces. Not then first
“ I knew it ; where in maple chamber glooms,
“ Crowned with what sanguine-heart pomegranate blooms,
“ Advanced it ever ? Men’s acknowledgment
“ Sanctioned my own : ’t was taken, Palma’s bent,—
“ Sordello,—recognized, accepted.

“ Dumb

“ Sat she still scheming. Ecelin would come
“ Gaunt, scared, ‘ Cesano baffles me,’ he ’d say :
“ ‘ Better I fought it out, my father’s way !
“ ‘ Strangle Ferrara in its drowning flats,
“ ‘ And you and your Taurello yonder !—what ’s
“ ‘ Romano’s business there ?’ An hour’s concern
“ To cure the froward Chief !—induce return
“ As heartened from those overmeaning eyes,
“ Wound up to persevere,—his enterprise

“Marked out anew, its exigent of wit
“Appoitioned,—she at liberty to sit
“And scheme against the next emergence, I—
“To covet her Taurello-sprite, made fly
“Or fold the wing—to con your horoscope
“For leave command those steely shafts shoot ope,
“Or straight assuage their blinding eagerness
“In blank smooth snow What semblance of success
“To any of my plans for making you
“Mine and Romano’s? Break the first wall through,
“Tread o’er the ruins of the Chief, supplant
“His sons beside, still, vainest were the vaunt :
“There, Salinguerra would obstruct me sheer,
“And the insuperable Tuscan, here,
“Stay me ! But one wild eve that Lady died
“In her lone chamber : only I beside :
“Taurello far at Naples, and my sire
“At Padua, Ecelin away in ire
“With Alberic. She held me thus—a clutch
“To make our spirits as our bodies touch—
“And so began flinging the past up heaps
“Of uncouth treasure from their sunless sleeps
“Within her soul ; deeds rose along with dreams,
“Fragments of many miserable schemes,
“Secrets, more secrets, then—no, not the last—
“’Mongst others, like a casual trick o’ the past,

“How . . . ay, she told me, gathering up her face,

“All left of it, into one arch-grimace

“To die with . . .

“Friend, ’t is gone ! but not the fear

“Of that fell laughing, heard as now I hear.

“Nor faltered voice, nor seemed her heart grow weak

“When i’ the midst abrupt she ceased to speak

“—Dead, as to serve a purpose, mark !—for in

“Rushed o’ the very instant Ecelin

“(How summoned, who divines?)—looking as if

“He understood why Adelaide lay stiff

“Already in my arms ; for ‘ Girl, how must

“‘I manage Este in the matter thrust

“‘Upon me, how unravel your bad coil?—

“‘Since’ (he declared) ‘ ’t is on your brow—a soil

“‘Like hers there !’ then in the same breath, ‘he
lacked

“‘No counsel after all, had signed no pact

“‘With devils, nor was treason here or there,

“‘Goito or Vicenza, his affair :

“‘He buried it in Adelaide’s deep grave,

“‘Would begin life afresh, now,—would not slave

“‘For any Friedrich’s nor Taurello’s sake !

“‘What bootéd him to meddle or to make

“‘In Lombardy?’ And afterward I knew

“The meaning of his promise to undo

"All she had done—why marriages were made,
 "New friendships entered on, old followers paid
 "With curses for their pains,—new friends' amaze
 "At height, when, passing out by Gate St. Blaise,
 "He stopped short in Vicenza, bent his head
 "Over a friar's neck;—'had vowed,' he said,
 "'Long since, nigh thirty years, because his wife
 "'And child were saved there, to bestow his life
 "'On God, his gettings on the Church.'

"Exiled

"Within Goito, still one dream beguiled
 "My days and nights; 't was found, the orb I sought
 "To serve, those glimpses came of Fomalhaut,
 "No other: but how serve it?—authorize
 "You and Romano mungle destinies?
 "And straight Romano's angel stood beside
 "Me who had else been Boniface's bride,
 "For Salinguerra 't was, with neck low bent,
 "And voice lightened to music, (as he meant
 "To learn, not teach me,) who withdrew the pall
 "From the dead past and straight revived it all,
 "Making me see how first Romano waxed,
 "Wherefore he waned now, why, if I relaxed
 "My grasp (even I!) would drop a thing effete,
 "Frayed by itself, unequal to complete
 "Its course, and counting every step astray

“ A gain so much. Romano, every way
“ Stable, a Lombard House now—why start back
“ Into the very outset of its track?
“ This patching principle which late allied
“ Our House with other Houses—what beside
“ Concerned the apparition, the first Knight
“ Who followed Conrad hither in such plight
“ His utmost wealth was summed in his one steed?
“ For Ecelo, that prowler, was decreed
“ A task, in the beginning hazardous
“ To him as ever task can be to us ;
“ But did the weather-beaten thief despair
“ When first our crystal cincture of warm air
“ That binds the Trevisan,—as its spice-belt
“ (Crusaders say) the tract where Jesus dwelt,—
“ Furtive he pierced, and Este was to face—
“ Despaired Saponian strength of Lombard grace?
“ Tried he at making surer aught made sure,
“ Maturing what already was mature?
“ No ; his heart prompted Ecelo, ‘ Confront
“ ‘ Este, inspect yourself. What ’s nature? Wont.
“ ‘ Discard three-parts your nature, and adopt
“ ‘ The rest as an advantage ! ’ Old strength propped
“ The man who first grew Podestà among
“ The Vicentines, no less than, while there sprung
“ His palace up in Padua like a threat,

" Their noblest spied a grace, unnoticed yet
 " In Conrad's crew. Thus far the object gained,
 " Romano was established—has remained—
 " ' For are you not Italian, truly peers
 " ' With Este? *Assò* better soothes our ears
 " ' Than *Alberic*? ' or is this lion's-crine
 " ' From over-mounts ' (this yellow hair of mine)
 " ' So weak a graft on Agnes Este's stock? '
 " (Thus went he on with something of a mock)
 " ' Wherefore recoil, then, from the very fate
 " ' Conceded you, refuse to imitate
 " ' Your model farther? Este long since left
 " ' Being mere Este: as a blade its heft,
 " ' Este required the Pope to further him:
 " ' And you, the Kaiser—whom your father's whim
 " ' Foregoes or, better, never shall forego
 " ' If Palma dare pursue what Ecelo
 " ' Commenced, but Ecelin desists from: just
 " ' As Adelaide of Susa could intrust
 " ' Her donative,—her Piedmont given the Pope,
 " ' Her Alpine-pass for him to shut or ope
 " ' Twixt France and Italy,—to the superb
 " ' Matilda's perfecting,—so, lest aught curb
 " ' Our Adelaide's great counter-project for
 " ' Giving her Trentine to the Emperor
 " ' With passage here from Germany,—shall you

“ ‘Take it,—my slender plodding talent, too!’

“ —Urged me Taurello with his half-smile

“ He

“ As Patron of the scattered family

“ Conveyed me to his Mantua, kept in bruit

“ Azzo’s alliances and Richard’s suit

“ Until, the Kaiser excommunicate,

“ ‘Nothing remains,’ Taurello said, ‘but wait

“ ‘Some rash procedure: Palma was the link,

“ ‘As Agnes’ child, between us, and they shrink

“ ‘From losing Palma: judge if we advance,

“ ‘Your father’s method, your inheritance!’

“ The day I was betrothed to Boniface

“ At Padua by Taurello’s self, took place

“ The outrage of the Ferrarese: again,

“ The day I sought Verona with the train

“ Agreed for,—by Taurello’s policy

“ Convicting Richard of the fault, since we

“ Were present to annul or to confirm,—

“ Richard, whose patience had outstayed its term,

“ Quitted Verona for the siege.

“ And now

“ What glory may engird Sordello’s brow

“ Through this? A month since at Olierio slunk

“ All that was Ecelin into a monk;

“ But how could Salinguerra so forget

“ His liege of thirty years as grudge even yet
“ One effort to recover him? He sent
“ Forthwith the tidings of this last event
“ To Ecelin—declared that he, despite
“ The recent folly, recognized his right
“ To order Salinguerra: ‘Should he wring
“ ‘Its uttermost advantage out, or fling
“ ‘This chance away? Or were his sons now Head
“ ‘O’ the House?’ Through me Taurello’s missive sped;
“ My father’s answer will by me return.
“ Behold! ‘For him,’ he writes, ‘no more concern
“ ‘With strife than, for his children, with fresh plots
“ ‘Of Friedrich. Old engagements out he blots
“ ‘For aye: Taurello shall no more subserve,
“ ‘Nor Ecelin impose.’ Lest this unnerve
“ Taurello at this juncture, slack his grip
“ Of Richard, suffer the occasion slip,—
“ I, in his sons’ default (who, mating with
“ Este, forsake Romano as the frith
“ Its mainsea for that firmland, sea makes head
“ Against) I stand, Romano,—in their stead
“ Assume the station they desert, and give
“ Still, as the Kaiser’s representative,
“ Taurello licence he demands. Midnight—
“ Morning—by noon to-morrow, making light
“ Of the League’s issue, we, in some gay weed

“ Like yours, disguised together, may precede
“ The arbitrators to Ferrara : reach
“ Him, let Taurello’s noble accents teach
“ The rest ! Then say if I have misconceived
“ Your destiny, too readily believed
“ The Kaiser’s cause your own ! ”

And Palma’s fled.

Though no affirmative disturbs the head,
A dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o’er,
Like the alighted planet Pollux wore,
Until, morn breaking, he resolves to be
Gate-vein of this heart’s blood of Lombardy,
Soul of this body—to wield this aggregate
Of souls and bodies, and so conquer fate
Though he should live—a centre of disgust
Even—apart, core of the outward crust
He vivifies, assimilates. For thus
I bring Sordello to the rapturous
Exclaim at the crowd’s cry, because one round
Of life was quite accomplished ; and he found
Not only that a soul, whate’er its might,
Is insufficient to its own delight,
Both in corporeal organs and in skill
By means of such to body forth its Will—
And, after, insufficient to apprise
Men of that Will, oblige them recognize

The Hid by the Revealed—but that,—the last
Nor lightest of the struggles overpast,—
Will, he bade abdicate, which would not void
The throne, might sit there, suffer he enjoyed
Mankind, a varied and divine array
Incapable of homage, the first way,
Nor fit to render incidentally
Tribute connived at, taken by the by,
In joys. If thus with warrant to rescind
The ignominious exile of mankind—
Whose proper service, ascertained intact
As yet, (to be by him themselves made act,
Not watch Sordello acting each of them)
Was to secure—if the true diadem
Seemed imminent while our Sordello drank
The wisdom of that golden Palma,—thank
Verona's Lady in her citadel
Founded by Gaulish Brennus, legends tell :
And truly when she left him, the sun reared
A head like the first clamberer's who peered
A-top the Capitol, his face on flame
With triumph, triumphing till Manlius came.
Nor slight too much my rhymes—that spring, dispread,
Dispart, disperse, lingering over head
Like an escape of angels ! Rather say,
My transcendental platan ! mounting gay

(An archimage so courts a novice-queen)
With tremulous silvered trunk, whence branches sheen
Laugh out, thick-foliated next, a-shiver soon
With coloured buds, then glowing like the moon
One mild flame,—last a pause, a burst, and all
Her ivory limbs are smothered by a fall,
Bloom-flinders and fruit-sparkles and leaf-dust,
Ending the weird work prosecuted just
For her amusement ; he decrepit, stark,
Dozes ; her uncontrolled delight may mark
Apart—

Yet not so, surely never so
Only, as good my soul were suffered go
O'er the lagune : forth fare thee, put aside—
Entrance thy synod, as a god may glide
Out of the world he fills, and leave it mute
For myriad ages as we men compute,
Returning into it without a break
O' the consciousness ! They sleep, and I awake
O'er the lagune, being at Venice.

Note,

In just such songs as Eglamor (say) wrote
With heart and soul and strength, for he believed
Himself achieving all to be achieved
By singer—in such songs you find alone
Completeness, judge the song and singer one,

And either purpose answered, his in it
Or its in him : while from true works (to wit
Sordello's dream-performances that will
Never be more than dreamed) escapes there still
Some proof, the singer's proper life was 'neath
The life his song exhibits, this a sheath
To that ; a passion and a knowledge far
Transcending these, majestic as they are,
Smouldered ; his lay was but an episode
In the bard's life : which evidence you owed
To some slight weariness, some looking-off
Or start-away. The childish skit or scoff
In "Charlemagne," (his poem, dreamed divine
In every point except one silly line
About the restiff daughters)—what may lurk
In that? "My life commenced before this work,"
(So I interpret the significance
Of the bard's start aside and look askance)
"My life continues after : on I fare
"With no more stopping, possibly, no care
"To note the undercurrent, the why and how,
"Where, when, o' the deeper life, as thus just now.
"But, silent, shall I cease to live? Alas
"For you ! who sigh, 'When shall it come to pass
" 'We read that story? How will he compress
" 'The future gains, his life's true business,

“ ‘ Into the better lay which—that one flout,
“ ‘ Howe’er inopportune it be, lets out—
“ ‘ Engrosses him already, though professed
“ ‘ To meditate with us eternal rest,
“ ‘ And partnership in all his life has found?’ ”
’T is but a sailor’s promise, weather-bound :
“ Strike sail, slip cable, here the bark be moored
“ For once, the awning stretched, the poles assured !
“ Noontide above ; except the wave’s crisp dash,
“ Or buzz of colibri, or tortoise’ splash,
“ The margin ’s silent : out with every spoil
“ Made in our tracking, coil by mighty coil,
“ This serpent of a river to his head
“ I’ the midst ! Admire each treasure, as we spread
“ The bank, to help us tell our history
“ Aright : give ear, endeavour to descry
“ The groves of giant rushes, how they grew
“ Like demons’ endlong tresses we sailed through,
“ What mountains yawned, forests to give us vent
“ Opened, each doleful side, yet on we went
“ Till . . . may that beetle (shake your cap) attest
“ The springing of a land-wind from the West ! ”
—Wherefore? Ah yes, you frolic it to-day !
To-morrow, and, the pageant moved away
Down to the poorest tent-pole, we and you
Part company : no other may pursue

Eastward your voyage, be informed what fate
Intends, if triumph or decline await
The tempter of the everlasting steppe.

I muse this on a ruined palace-step
At Venice : why should I break off, nor sit
Longer upon my step, exhaust the fit
England gave birth to? Who 's adorable
Enough reclaim a —— no Sordello's Will
Alack !—be queen to me? That Bassanese
Busied among her smoking fruit-boats? These
Perhaps from our delicious Asolo
Who twinkle, pigeons o'er the portico
Not prettier, bind June lilies into sheaves
To deck the bridge-side chapel, dropping leaves
Soiled by their own loose gold-meal? Ah, beneath
The cool arch stoops she, brownest cheek ! Her wreath
Endures a month—a half-month—if I make
A queen of her, continue for her sake
Sordello's story? Nay, that Paduan girl
Splashes with barer legs where a live whirl
In the dead black Giudecca proves sea-weed
Drifting has sucked down three, four, all indeed
Save one pale-red striped, pale-blue turbaned post
For gondolas.

 You sad dishevelled ghost
That pluck at me and point, are you advised

I breathe? Let stay those girls (e'en her disguised
—Jewels i' the locks that love no crownnet like
Their native field-buds and the green wheat-spike,
So fair!—who left this end of June's turmoil,
Shook off, as might a lily its gold soil,
Pomp, save a foolish gem or two, and free
In dream, came join the peasants o'er the sea.)
Look they too happy, too tricked out? Confess
There is such niggard stock of happiness
To share, that, do one's uttermost, dear wretch,
One labours ineffectually to stretch
It o'er you so that mother and children, both
May equitably flaunt the sumpter-cloth!
Divide the robe yet farther: be content
With seeing just a score pre-eminent
Through shreds of it, acknowledged happy wights,
Engrossing what should furnish all, by rights!
For, these in evidence, you clearer claim
A like garb for the rest,—grace all, the same
As these my peasants. I ask youth and strength
And health for each of you, not more—at length
Grown wise, who asked at home that the whole race
Might add the spirit's to the body's grace,
And all be dizen'd out as chiefs and bards.
But in this magic weather one discards
Much old requirement. Venice seems a type

Of Life—'twixt blue and blue extends, a stripe,
As Life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt nought and nought :
'T is Venice, and 't is Life—as good you sought
To spare me the Piazza's slippery stone
Or keep me to the unchoked canals alone,
As hinder Life the evil with the good
Which make up Living, rightly understood.
Only, do finish something ! Peasants, queens,
Take them, made happy by whatever means,
Parade them for the common credit, vouch
That a luckless residue, we send to crouch
In corners out of sight, was just as framed
For happiness, its portion might have claimed
As well, and so, obtaining joy, had stalked
Fastuous as any !—such my project, baulked
Already ; I hardly venture to adjust
The first rags, when you find me. To mistrust
Me !—nor unreasonably. You, no doubt,
Have the true knack of tiring suitors out
With those thin lips on tremble, lashless eyes
Inveterately tear-shot : there, be wise,
Mistress of mine, there, there, as if I meant
You insult !—shall your friend (not slave) be shent
For speaking home ? Beside, care-bit erased
Broken-up beauties ever took my taste
Supremely ; and I love you more, far more

Than her I looked should foot Life's temple-floor.
Years ago, leagues at distance, when and where
A whisper came, "Let others seek!—thy care
"Is found, thy life's provision; if thy race
"Should be thy mistress, and into one face
"The many faces crowd?" Ah, had I, judge,
Or no, your secret? Rough apparel—grudge
All ornaments save tag or tassel worn
To hint we are not thoroughly forlorn—
Slouch bonnet, unloop mantle, careless go
Alone (that 's saddest, but it must be so)
Through Venice, sing now and now glance aside,
Aught desultory or undignified,—
Then, ravishingest lady, will you pass
Or not each formidable group, the mass
Before the Basilic (that feast gone by,
God's great day of the Corpus Domini)
And, wistfully foregoing proper men,
Come timid up to me for alms? And then
The luxury to hesitate, feign do
Some unexampled grace!—when, whom but you
Dare I bestow your own upon? And hear
Further before you say, it is to sneer
I call you ravishing; for I regret
Little that she, whose early foot was set
Forth as she 'd plant it on a pedestal,

Now, i' the silent city, seems to fall
Toward me—no wreath, only a lip's unrest
To quiet, surcharged eyelids to be pressed
Dry of their tears upon my bosom. Strange
Such sad chance should produce in thee such change,
My love! Warped souls and bodies! yet God spoke
Of right-hand, foot and eye—selects our yoke,
Sordello, as your poetship may find!
So, sleep upon my shoulder, child, nor mind
Their foolish talk; we'll manage reinstate
Your old worth; ask moreover, when they prate
Of evil men past hope, "Don't each contrive,
"Despite the evil you abuse, to live?—
"Keeping, each losel, through a maze of lies,
"His own conceit of truth? to which he hies
"By obscure windings, tortuous, if you will,
"But to himself not inaccessible;
"He sees truth, and his lies are for the crowd
"Who cannot see; some fancied right allowed
"His vilest wrong, empowered the losel clutch
"One pleasure from a multitude of such
"Denied him." Then assert, "All men appear
"To think all better than themselves, by here
"Trusting a crowd they wrong; but really," say,
"All men think all men stupider than they,
"Since, save themselves, no other comprehends

“ The complicated scheme to make amends
“ —Evil, the scheme by which, thro’ Ignorance,
“ Good labours to exist.” A slight advance,—
Merely to find the sickness you die through,
And nought beside ! but if one can’t eschew
One’s portion in the common lot, at least
One can avoid an ignorance increased
Tenfold by dealing out hint after hint
How nought were like dispensing without stint
The water of life—so easy to dispense
Beside, when one has probed the centre whence
Commotion ’s born—could tell you of it all !
“ —Meantime, just meditate my madrigal
“ O’ the mugwort that conceals a dewdrop safe !”
What, dullard ? we and you in smothery chafe,
Babes, baldheads, stumbled thus far into Zin
The Horrid, getting neither out nor in,
A hungry sun above us, sands that bung
Our throats,—each dromedary lolls a tongue,
Each camel churns a sick and frothy chap,
And you, ’twixt tales of Potiphar’s mishap,
And sonnets on the earliest ass that spoke,
—Remark, you wonder any one needs choke
With founts about ! Potsherd him, Gibeonites !
While awkwardly enough your Moses smites
The rock, though he forego his Promised Land

Thereby, have Satan claim his carcass, and
Figure as Metaphysic Poet . . . ah,
Mark ye the dim first ooziings? Merbah !
Then, quaffing at the fount my courage gained,
Recall—not that I prompt ye—who explained . . .

“ Presumptuous ! ” interrupts one. You, not I
’T is brother, marvel at and magnify
Such office : “ office,” quotha? can we get
To the beginning of the office yet?
What do we here? simply experiment
Each on the other’s power and its intent
When elsewhere tasked,—if this of mine were trucked
For yours to either’s good,—we watch construct,
In short, an engine : with a finished one,
What it can do, is all,—nought, how ’t is done.
But this of ours yet in probation, dusk
A kernel of strange wheelwork through its husk
Grows into shape by quarters and by halves ;
Remark this tooth’s spring, wonder what that valve’s
Fall bodes, presume each faculty’s device,
Make out each other more or less precise—
The scope of the whole engine ’s to be proved ;
We die : which means to say, the whole ’s removed,
Dismounted wheel by wheel, this complex gin,—
To be set up anew elsewhere, begin
A task indeed, but with a clearer clime

Than the murk lodgment of our building-time.
And then, I grant you, it behoves forget
How 't is done—all that must amuse us yet
So long : and, while you turn upon your heel,
Pray that I be not busy slitting steel
Or shredding brass, camped on some virgin shore
Under a cluster of fresh stars, before
I name a tithe o' the wheels I trust to do !

So occupied, then, are we : hitherto,
At present, and a weary while to come,
The office of ourselves,—nor blind nor dumb,
And seeing somewhat of man's state,—has been,
For the worst of us, to say they so have seen ;
For the better, what it was they saw ; the best
Impart the gift of seeing to the rest :
“ So that I glance,” says such an one, “ around,
“ And there 's no face but I can read profound
“ Disclosures in ; this stands for hope, that—fear,
“ And for a speech, a deed in proof, look here !
“ ‘ Stoop, else the strings of blossom, where the nuts
“ ‘ O'erarch, will blind thee ! Said I not ? She shuts
“ ‘ Both eyes this time, so close the hazels meet !
“ ‘ Thus, prisoned in the Piombi, I repeat
“ ‘ Events one rove occasioned, o'er and o'er,
“ ‘ Putting 'twixt me and madness evermore
“ ‘ Thy sweet shape, Zanze ! Therefore stoop !’

“ ‘That’s truth !’

“(Adjudge you) ‘the incarcerated youth

“ ‘Would say that !’

“ Youth? Plara the bard? Set down

“ That Plara spent his youth in a grim town

“ Whose cramped ill-featured streets huddled about

“ The minster for protection, never out

“ Of its black belfry’s shade and its bells’ roar.

“ The brighter shone the suburb,—all the more

“ Ugly and absolute that shade’s reproof

“ Of any chance escape of joy,—some roof,

“ Taller than they, allowed the rest detect,—

“ Before the sole permitted laugh (suspect

“ Who could, ’t was meant for laughter, that ploughed
cheek’s

“ Repulsive gleam !) when the sun stopped both peaks

“ Of the cleat belfry like a fiery wedge,

“ Then sank, a huge flame on its socket edge,

“ With leavings on the grey glass oriel-pane

“ Ghastly some minutes more. No fear of rain—

“ The minster minded that ! in heaps the dust

“ Lay everywhere. This town, the minster’s trust,

“ Held Plara ; who, its denizen, bade hail

“ In twice twelve sonnets, Tempe’s dewy vale.”

“ ‘Exact the town, the minster and the street !’ ”

“ As all mirth triumphs, sadness means defeat:

"Lust triumphs and is gay, Love 's triumphed o'er
 "And sad : but Lucio 's sad. I said before,
 "Love 's sad, not Lucio ; one who loves may be
 "As gay his love has leave to hope, as he
 "Downcast that lusts' desire escapes the springe :
 "'T is of the mood itself I speak, what tinge
 "Determines it, else colourless,—or mirth,
 "Or melancholy, as from heaven or earth."
 "'Ay, that 's the variation's gist !'

"Indeed?

"Thus far advanced in safety then, proceed !
 "And having seen too what I saw, be bold
 "And next encounter what I do behold
 "(That 's sure) but bid you take on trust !"

Attack

The use and purpose of such sights ! Alack,
 Not so unwisely does the crowd dispense
 On Salinguerras praise in preference
 To the Sordellos : men of action, these !
 Who, seeing just as little as you please,
 Yet turn that little to account,—engage
 With, do not gaze at,—carry on, a stage,
 The work o' the world, not merely make report
 The work existed ere their day ! In short,
 When at some future no-time a brave band
 Sees, using what it sees, then shake my hand

In heaven, my brother ! Meanwhile where 's the hurt
Of keeping the Makers-see on the alert,
At whose defection mortals stare aghast
As though heaven's bounteous windows were slammed
fast

Incontinent? Whereas all you, beneath,
Should scowl at, bruise their lips and break their teeth
Who ply the pullies, for neglecting you :
And therefore have I moulded, made anew
A Man, and give him to be turned and tried,
Be angry with or pleased at. On your side,
Have ye times, places, actors of your own?
Try them upon Sordello when full-grown,
And then—ah then ! If Hercules first parched
His foot in Egypt only to be marched
A sacrifice for Jove with pomp to suit,
What chance have I? The demigod was mute
Till, at the altar, where time out of mind
Such guests became oblations, chaplets twined
His forehead long enough, and he began
Slaying the slayers, nor escaped a man.
Take not affront, my gentle audience ! whom
No Hercules shall make his hecatomb,
Believe, nor from his brows your chaplet rend—
That 's your kind suffrage, yours, my patron-friend,
Whose great verse blares unintermittent on

Like your own trumpeter at Marathon,—
You who, Plataea and Salamis being scant,
Put up with Ætna for a stimulant—
And did well, I acknowledged, as he loomed
Over the midland sea last month, presumed
Long, lay demolished in the blazing West
At eve, while towards him tilting cloudlets pressed
Like Persian ships at Salamis. Friend, wear
A crest proud as desert while I declare
Had I a flawless ruby fit to wring
Tears of its colour from that painted king
Who lost it, I would, for that smile which went
To my heart, fling it in the sea, content,
Wearing your verse in place, an amulet
Sovereign against all passion, wear and fret !
My English Eyebright, if you are not glad
That, as I stopped my task awhile, the sad
Dishevelled form, wherein I put mankind
To come at times and keep my pact in mind,
Renewed me,—hear no crickets in the hedge,
Nor let a glowworm spot the river's edge
At home, and may the summer showers gush
Without a warning from the missel thrush !
So, to our business, now—the fate of such
As find our common nature—overmuch
Despised because restricted and unfit

To bear the burthen they impose on it—
Cling when they would discard it ; craving strength
To leap from the allotted world, at length
They do leap,—flounder on without a term,
Each a god's germ, doomed to remain a germ
In unexpanded infancy, unless . . .
But that 's the story—dull enough, confess !
There might be fitter subjects to allure ;
Still, neither misconceive my portraiture
Nor undervalue its adornments quaint :
What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint.
Ponder a story ancient pens transmit,
Then say if you condemn me or acquit.

John the Beloved, banished Antioch
For Patmos, bade collectively his flock
Farewell, but set apart the closing eve
To comfort those his exile most would grieve,
He knew : a touching spectacle, that house
In motion to receive him ! Xanthus' spouse
You missed, made panther's meat a month since ; but
Xanthus himself (his nephew 't was, they shut
'Twixt boards and sawed asunder) Polycarp,
Soft Charicle, next year no wheel could warp
To swear by Cæsar's fortune, with the rest
Were ranged ; thro' whom the grey disciple pressed,
Busily blessing right and left, just stopped

To pat one infant's curls, the hangman cropped
Soon after, reached the portal. On its hinge
The door turns and he enters : what quick twinge
Ruins the smiling mouth, those wide eyes fix
Whereon, why like some spectral candlestick's
Branch the disciple's arms? Dead swooned he, woke
Anon, heaved sigh, made shift to gasp, heart-broke,
"Get thee behind me, Satan! Have I toiled
"To no more purpose? Is the gospel foiled
"Here too, and o'er my son's, my Xanthus' hearth,
"Portrayed with sooty garb and features swarth—
"Ah Xanthus, am I to thy roof beguiled
"To see the—the—the Devil domiciled? "
Whereto sobbed Xanthus, "Father, 't is yourself
"Installed, a limning which our utmost pelf
"Went to procure against to-morrow's loss ;
"And that 's no twy-prong, but a pastoral cross,
"You 're painted with ! "

His puckered brows unfold—
And you shall hear Sordello's story told.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

MEANTIME Ferrara lay in rueful case ;
 The lady-city, for whose sole embrace
 Her pair of suitors struggled, felt their arms
 A brawny mischief to the fragile charms
 They tugged for—one discovering that to twist
 Her tresses twice or thrice about his wrist
 Secured a point of vantage—one, how best
 He 'd parry that by planting in her breast
 His elbow spike—each party too intent
 For noticing, howe'er the battle went,
 The conqueror would but have a corpse to kiss.
 “ May Boniface be duly damned for this ! ”
 —Howled some old Ghibellin, as up he turned,
 From the wet heap of rubbish where they burned
 His house, a little skull with dazzling teeth :
 “ A boon, sweet Christ—let Salinguerra seethe
 “ In hell for ever, Christ, and let myself
 “ Be there to laugh at him ! ”—moaned some young
 Guelf

“Tito!” Our delegates exchanged a glance,
And, keeping the main way, admired askance
The lazy engines of outlandish birth,
Couched like a king each on its bank of earth—
Arbalist, manganel and catapult;
While stationed by, as waiting a result,
Lean silent gangs of mercenaries ceased
Working to watch the strangers. “This, at least,
“Were better spared; he scarce presumes gainsay
“The League’s decision! Get our friend away
“And profit for the future: how else teach
“Fools ’t is not safe to stray within claw’s reach
“Ere Salinguerra’s final gasp be blown?
“Those mere convulsive scratches find the bone.
“Who bade him bloody the spent osprey’s nare?”

The carrochs halted in the public square.
Pennons of every blazon once a-flaunt,
Men prattled, freelier than the crested gaunt
White ostrich with a horse-shoe in her beak
Was missing, and whoever chose might speak
“Ecelin” boldly out: so,—“Ecelin
“Needed his wife to swallow half the sin
“And sickens by himself: the devil’s whelp,
“He styles his son, dwindles away, no help
“From conserves, your fine triple-curved froth
“Of virgin’s blood, your Venice viper-broth—

“Eh? Jubilate!”—“Peace! no little word
“You utter here that ’s not distinctly heard
“Up at Oliero: he was absent sick
“When we besieged Bassano—who, i’ the thick
“O’ the work, perceived the progress Azzo made,
“Like Ecelin, through his witch Adelaide?
“She managed it so well that, night by night
“At their bed-foot stood up a soldier-sprite,
“First fresh, pale by-and-by without a wound,
“And, when it came with eyes filmed as in swound,
“They knew the place was taken.”—“Ominous
“That Ghibellins should get what cautelous
“Old Redbeard sought from Azzo’s sire to wrench
“Vainly; Saint George contrived his town a trench
“O’ the marshes, an impermeable bar.”
“—Young Ecelin is meant the tutelar
“Of Padua, rather; veins embrace upon
“His hand like Brenta and Bacchuglion.”
What now?—“The founts! God’s bread, touch not a
plank!
“A crawling hell of carrion—every tank
“Choke-full!—found out just now to Cino’s cost—
“The same who gave Taurello up for lost,
“And, making no account of fortune’s freaks,
“Refused to budge from Padua then, but sneaks
“Back now with Concorezzi: ’faith! they drag

"Their carroch to San Vitale, plant the flag
 "On his own palace, so adroitly razed
 "He knew it not ; a sort of Guelf folk gazed
 "And laughed apart ; Cino disliked their air—
 "Must pluck up spirit, show he does not care—
 "Seats himself on the tank's edge—will begin
 "To hum, *za, za,* Cavalier Ecelin—*
 "A silence ; he gets warmer, clinks to chime,
 "Now both feet plough the ground, deeper each time,
 "At last, *za, za* and up with a fierce kick
 "Comes his own mother's face caught by the thick
 "Grey hair about his spur ! "

Which means, they lift

The covering, Salinguerra made a shift
 To stretch upon the truth ; as well avoid
 Further disclosures ; leave them thus employed.
 Our dropping Autumn morning clears apace,
 And poor Ferrara puts a softened face
 On her misfortunes. Let us scale this tall
 Huge foursquare line of red brick garden-wall
 Bastioned within by trees of every sort
 On three sides, slender, spreading, long and short ;
 Each grew as it contrived, the poplar ramped,
 The fig-tree reared itself,—but stark and cramped,
 Made fools of, like tamed lions : whence, on the edge,
 Running 'twixt trunk and trunk to smooth one ledge

Of shade, were shrubs inserted, warp and woof,
Which smothered up that variance. Scale the roof
Of solid tops, and o'er the slope you slide
Down to a grassy space level and wide,
Here and there dotted with a tree, but trees
Of rarer leaf, each foreigner at ease,
Set by itself: and in the centre spreads,
Borne upon three uneasy leopards' heads,
A laver, broad and shallow, one bright spirt
Of water bubbles in. The walls begirt
With trees leave off on either hand; pursue
Your path along a wondrous avenue
Those walls abut on, heaped of gleamy stone,
With aloes leering everywhere, grey-grown
From many a Moorish summer: how they wind
Out of the fissures! likelier to bind
The building than those rusted cramps which drop
Already in the eating sunshine. Stop,
You fleeting shapes above there! Ah, the pride
Or else despair of the whole country-side!
A range of statues, swarming o'er with wasps,
God, goddess, woman, man, the Greek rough-rasps
In crumbling Naples marble—meant to look
Like those Messina marbles Constance took
Delight in, or Taurello's self conveyed
To Mantua for his mistress, Adelaide,—

A certain font with caryatides
Since cloistered at Gorto ; only, these
Are up and doing, not abashed, a troop
Able to right themselves—who see you, stoop
Their arms o' the instant after you ! Unplucked
By this or that, you pass ; for they conduct
To terrace raised on terrace, and, between,
Creatures of brighter mould and braver mien
Than any yet, the choicest of the Isle
No doubt. Here, left a sullen breathing-while,
Up-gathered on himself the Fighter stood
For his last fight, and, wiping treacherous blood
Out of the eyelids just held ope beneath
Those shading fingers in their iron sheath,
Steadied his strengths amid the buzz and stir
Of the dusk hideous amphitheatre
At the announcement of his over-match
To wind the day's diversion up, dispatch
The pertinacious Gaul : while, limbs one heap,
The Slave, no breath in her round mouth, watched leap
Dart after dart forth, as her hero's car
Clove dizzily the solid of the war
—Let coil about his knees for pride in him.
We reach the farthest terrace, and the grim
San Pietro Palace stops us.

Such the state

Of Salinguerra's plan to emulate
Sicilian marvels, that his girlish wife
Retrude still might lead her ancient life
In her new home : whereat enlarged so much
Neighbours upon the novel princely touch
He took,—who here imprisons Boniface.
Here must the Envoys come to sue for grace ;
And here, emerging from the labyrinth
Below, Sordello paused beside the plinth
Of the door-pillar.

He had really left
Verona for the cornfields (a poor theft
From the morass) where Este's camp was made ;
The Envoys' march, the Legate's cavalcade—
All had been seen by him, but scarce as when,—
Eager for cause to stand aloof from men
At every point save the fantastic tie
Acknowledged in his boyish sophistry,—
He made account of such. A crowd,—he meant
To task the whole of it ; each part's intent
Concerned him therefore : and, the more he pried,
The less became Sordello satisfied
With his own figure at the moment. Sought
He respite from his task ? Descried he aught
Novel in the anticipated sight
Of all these livers upon all delight ?

This phalanx, as of myriad points combined,
Whereby he still had imaged the mankind
His youth was passed in dreams of rivalling,
His age—in plans to prove at least such thing
Had been so dreamed,—which now he must impress
With his own will, effect a happiness
By theirs,—supply a body to his soul
Thence, and become eventually whole
With them as he had hoped to be without—
Made these the mankind he once raved about?
Because a few of them were notable,
Should all be figured worthy note? As well
Expect to find Taurello's triple line
Of trees a single and prodigious pine.
Real pines rose here and there; but, close among,
Thrust into and mixed up with pines, a throng
Of shrubs, he saw,—a nameless common sort
O'erpast in dreams, left out of the report
And hurried into corners, or at best
Admitted to be fancied like the rest.
Reckon that morning's proper chiefs—how few!
And yet the people grew, the people grew,
Grew ever, as if the many there indeed,
More left behind and most who should succeed,—
Simply in virtue of their mouths and eyes,
Petty enjoyments and huge miseries,—

Mingled with, and made veritably great
Those chiefs : he overlooked not Mainard's state
Nor Concorezzi's station, but instead
Of stopping there, each dwindled to be head
Of infinite and absent Tyrolese
Or Paduans ; startling all the more, that these
Seemed passive and disposed of, uncared for,
Yet doubtless on the whole (like Eglamor)
Smiling ; for if a wealthy man decays
And out of store of robes must wear, all days,
One tattered suit, alike in sun and shade,
'T is commonly some tarnished gay brocade
Fit for a feast-night's flourish and no more :
Nor otherwise poor Misery from her store
Of looks is fain upgather, keep unfurled
For common wear as she goes through the world,
The faint remainder of some worn-out smile
Meant for a feast-night's service merely. While
Crowd upon crowd rose on Sordello thus,—
(Crowds no way interfering to discuss,
Much less dispute, life's joys with one employed
In envying them,—or, if they aught enjoyed,
Where lingered something indefinable
In every look and tone, the mirth as well
As woe, that fixed at once his estimate
Of the result, their good or bad estate)—

Old memories returned with new effect :
And the new body, ere he could suspect,
Cohered, mankind and he were really fused,
The new self seemed impatient to be used
By him, but utterly another way
Than that anticipated : strange to say,
They were too much below him, more in thrall
Than he, the adjunct than the principal.
What bootéd scattered units?—here a mind
And there, which might repay his own to find,
And stamp, and use?—a few, howe'er august,
If all the rest were grovelling in the dust?
No : first a mighty equilibrium, sure,
Should he establish, privilege procure
For all, the few had long possessed ! He felt
An error, an exceeding error melt :
While he was occupied with Mantuan chants,
Behoved him think of men, and take their wants,
Such as he now distinguished every side,
As his own want which might be satisfied,—
And, after that, think of rare qualities
Of his'own soul demanding exercise.
It followed naturally, through no claim
On their part, which made virtue of the aim
At serving them, on his,—that, past retrieve,
He felt now in their toils, theirs—nor could leave

Wonder how, in the eagerness to rule,
Impress his will on mankind, he (the fool !)
Had never even entertained the thought
That this his last arrangement might be fraught
With incidental good to them as well,
And that mankind's delight would help to swell
His own. So, if he sighed, as formerly
Because the merry time of life must fleet,
'T was deeper now,—for could the crowds repeat
Their poor experiences? His hand that shook
Was twice to be deplored. “The Legate, look !
“With eyes, like fresh-blown thrush-eggs on a thread,
“Faint-blue and loosely floating in his head,
“Large tongue, moist open mouth ; and this long while
“That owner of the idiotic smile
“Serves them !”

He fortunately saw in time
His fault however, and since the office prime
Includes the secondary—best accept
Both offices ; Taurello, its adept,
Could teach him the preparatory one,
And how to do what he had fancied done
Long previously, ere take the greater task.
How render first these people happy? Ask
The people's friends : for there must be one good
One way to it—the Cause ! He understood

The meaning now of Palma ; why the jar
Else, the ado, the trouble wide and far
Of Guelfs and Ghibellins, the Lombard hope
And Rome's despair?—'twixt Emperor and Pope
The confused shifting sort of Eden tale—
Hardihood still recurring, still to fail—
That foreign interloping fiend, this free
And native overbrooding deity :
Yet a dire fascination o'er the palms
The Kaiser ruined, troubling even the calms
Of paradise ; or, on the other hand,
The Pontiff, as the Kaisers understand,
One snake-like cursed of God to love the ground,
Whose heavy length breaks in the noon profound
Some saving tree—which needs the Kaiser, dressed
As the dislodging angel of thât pest :
Yet flames that pest bedropped, flat head, full fold,
With coruscating dower of dyes. “ Behold
“ The secret, so to speak, and master-spring
“ O' the contest !—which of the two Powers shall bring
“ Men good, perchance the most good : ay, it may
“ Be thât !—the question, which best knows the way.”
And hereupon Count Mainard strutted past
Out of San Pietro ; never seemed the last
Of archers, slingers : and our friend began
To recollect strange modes of serving man—

Arbalist, catapult, brake, manganel,
And more. "This way of theirs may,—who can tell?—
"Need perfecting," said he: "let all be solved
"At once! Taurello 't is, the task devolved
"On late: confront Taurello!"

And at last

He did confront him. Scarce an hour had past
When forth Sordello came, older by years
Than at his entry. Unexampl'd fears
Oppressed him, and he staggered off, blind, mute
And deaf, like some fresh-mutilated brute,
Into Ferrara—not the empty town
That morning witnessed: he went up and down
Streets whence the veil had been stript shred by shred,
So that, in place of huddling with their dead
Indoors, to answer Salinguerra's ends,
Townsfolk make shift to crawl forth, sit like friends
With any one. A woman gave him choice
Of her two daughters, the infantile voice
Or the dimpled knee, for half a chain, his throat—
Was clasped with; but an archer knew the coat—
Its blue cross and eight lilies,—bade beware—
One dogging him in concert with the pair
Though thrumming on the sleeve that hid his knife.
Night set in early, autumn dews were rife,
They kindled great fires while the Leaguers' mass

Began at every carroch : he must pass
Between the kneeling people. Presently
The carroch of Verona caught his eye
With purple trappings ; silently he bent
Over its fire, when voices violent
Began, " Affirm not whom the youth was like
" That struck me from the porch : I did not strike
" Again : I too have chestnut hair ; my kin
" Hate Azzo and stand up for Eceiun.
" Here, minstrel, drive bad thoughts away ! Sing ! Take
" My glove for guerdon ! " And for that man's sake
He turned : " A song of Eglamor's ! "—scarce named,
When, " Our Sordello's rather ! "—all exclaimed ;
" Is not Sordello famousest for rhyme ? "
He had been happy to deny, this time,—
Profess as heretofore the aching head
And failing heart,—suspect that in his stead
Some true Apollo had the charge of them,
Was champion to reward or to condemn,
So his intolerable risk might shift
Or share itself ; but Naddo's precious gift
Of gifts, he owned, be certain ! At the close—
" I made that," said he to a youth who rose
As if to hear : 't was Palma through the band
Conducted him in silence by her hand.

Back now for Salinguerra. Tito of Trent

Gave place to Palma and her friend, who went
In turn at Montelungo's visit : one
After the other were they come and gone,—
These spokesmen for the Kaiser and the Pope,
This incarnation of the People's hope,
Sordello,—all the say of each was said ;
And Salinguerra sat,—himself instead
Of these to talk with, lingered musing yet.
'T was a drear vast presence-chamber roughly set
In order for the morning's use ; full face,
The Kaiser's ominous sign-mark had first place,
The crowned grim twy-necked eagle, coarsely-blackened
With ochre on the naked wall ; nor lacked
Romano's green and yellow either side ;
But the new token Tito brought had tried
The Legate's patience—nay, if Palma knew
What Salinguerra almost meant to do
Until the sight of her restored his lip
A certain half-smile, three months' chieftainship
Had banished ! Afterward, the Legate found
No change in him, nor asked what badge he wound
And unwound carelessly. Now sat the Chief
Silent as when our couple left, whose brief
Encounter wrought so opportune effect
In thoughts he summoned not, nor would reject,
Though time 't was now if ever, to pause—fix

On any sort of ending : wiles and tricks
Exhausted, judge ! his charge, the crazy town,
Just managed to be hindered crashing down—
His last sound troops ranged—care observed to post
His best of the maimed soldiers innermost—
So much was plain enough, but somehow struck
Him not before.* And now with this strange luck
Of Tito's news, rewarding his address
So well, what thought he of?—how the success
With Friedrich's rescript there, would either hush
Old Ecelin's scruples, bring the manly flush
To his young son's white cheek, or, last, exempt
Himself from telling what there was to tempt?
No : that this minstrel was Romano's last
Servant—himself the first ! Could he contrast
The whole !—that minstrel's thirty years just spent
In doing nought, their notablest event
This morning's journey hither, as I told—
Who yet was lean, outworn and really old,
A stammering awkward man that scarce dared raise
His eye before the magisterial gaze—
And Salinguerra with his fears and hopes
Of sixty years, his Emperors and Popes,
Cares and contrivances, yet, you would say,
'T was a youth nonchalantly looked away
Through the embrasure northward o'er the sick

Expostulating trees—so agile, quick
And graceful turned the head on the broad chest
Encased in pliant steel, his constant vest,
Whence split the sun off in a spray of fire
Across the room ; and, loosened of its tire
Of steel, that head let breathe the comely brown
Large massive locks discoloured as if a crown
Encircled them, so frayed the basnet where
A sharp white line divided clean the hair ;
Glossy above, glossy below, it swept
Curling and fine about a brow thus kept
Calm, laid coat upon coat, marble and sound :
This was the mystic mark the Tuscan found,
Mused of, turned over books about. Square-faced,
No lion more ; two vivid eyes, enchased
In hollows filled with many a shade and streak
Settling from the bold nose and bearded cheek.
Nor might the half-smile reach them that deformed
A lip supremely perfect else—unwarmed,
Unwidened, less or more ; indifferent
Whether on trees or men his thoughts were bent,
Thoughts rarely, after all, in trim and train
As now a period was fulfilled again :
Of such, a series made his life, compressed
In each, one story serving for the rest—
How his life-streams rolling arrived at last

At the barrier, whence, were it once
They would emerge, a river to the end,—
Gathered themselves up, paused, bade fate
Took the leap, hung a minute at the height,
Then fell back to oblivion infinite :
Therefore he smiled. Beyond stretched
Where late the adversary, breaking bounds,
Had gained him an occasion, That above,
That eagle, testified he could improve
Effectually. The Kaiser's symbol lay
Beside his rescript, a new badge by way
Of baldric; while,—another thing that
Alike emprise, achievement and reward,—
Ecelin's missive was conspicuous too.

What past life did those flying thoughts
As his, few names in Mantua half so old ;
But at Ferrara, where his sires enrolled
It latterly, the Adelardi spared
No pains to rival them : both factions
Ferrara, so that, counted out, 't would yield
A product very like the city's shield,
Half black and white, or Ghibellin and
As after Salinguerra styled himself
And Este who, till Marchesalla died,
(Last of the Adelardi)—never tried
His fortune there : with Marchesalla's child

Would pass,—could Blacks and Whites be reconciled
And young Taurello wed Linguetta,—wealth
And sway to a sole grasp. Each treats by stealth
Already: when the Guelfs, the Ravennese
Arrive, assault the Pietro quarter, seize
Linguetta, and are gone! Men's first dismay
Abated somewhat, hurries down, to lay
The after indignation, Boniface,
This Richard's father. "Learn the full disgrace
"Averted, ere you blame us Guelfs, who rate
"Your Salinguerra, your sole potentate
"That might have been, 'mongst Este's valvassors—
"Ay, Azzo's—who, not privy to, abhors
"Our step; but we were zealous." Azzo then
To do with! Straight a meeting of old men:
"Old Salinguerra dead, his heir a boy,
"What if we change our ruler and decoy
"The Lombard Eagle of the azure sphere
"With Italy to build in, fix him here,
"Settle the city's troubles in a trice?
"For private wrong, let public good suffice!"
In fine, young Salinguerra's staunchest friends
Talked of the townsmen making him amends,
Gave him a goshawk, and affirmed there was
Rare sport, one morning, over the green grass
A mile or so. He sauntered through the plain,

Was restless, fell to thinking, turned again
In time for Azzo's entry with the bride ;
Count Boniface rode smurking at their side ;
"She brings him half Ferrara," whispers flew,
"And all Ancona ! If the stripling knew !"

Anon the stripling was in Sicily
Where Heinrich ruled in right of Constance ; he
Was gracious nor his guest incapable ;
Each understood the other. So it fell,
One Spring, when Azzo, thoroughly at ease,
Had near forgotten by what precise degrees
He crept at first to such a downy seat,
The Count trudged over in a special heat
To bid him of God's love dislodge from each
Of Salinguerra's palaces,—a breach
Might yawn else, not so readily to shut,
For who was just arrived at Mantua but
The youngster, sword on thigh and tuft on chin,
With tokens for Celano, Eccelin,
Pistore, and the like ! Next news,—no whit
Do any of Ferrara's domes befit
His wife of Heinrich's very blood : a band .
Of foreigners assemble, understand
Garden-constructing, level and surround,
Build up and bury in. A last news crowned
The consternation : since his infant's birth,

He only waits they end his wondrous girth
Of trees that link San Pietro with Tomà,
To visit Mantua. When the Podestà
Eceln, at Vicenza, called his friend
Taurello thither, what could be their end
But to restore the Ghibellins' late Head,
The Kaiser helping? He with most to dread
From vengeance and reprisal, Azzo, there
With Boniface beforehand, as aware
Of plots in progress, gave alarm, expelled
Both plotters : but the Guelfs in triumph yelled
Too hastily. The burning and the flight,
And how Taurello, occupied that night
With Eceln, lost wife and son, I told :
—Not how he bore the blow, retained his hold,
Got friends safe through, left enemies the worst
O' the fray, and hardly seemed to care at first :
But afterward men heard not constantly
Of Salinguerra's House so sure to be !
Though Azzo simply gained by the event
A shifting of his plagues—the first, content
To fall behind the second and estrange
So far his nature, suffer such a change
That in Romano sought he wife and child,
And for Romano's sake seemed reconciled
To losing individual life, which shrunk

As the other prospered—mortised in his trunk ;
 Like a dwarf palm which wanton Arabs foil
 Of bearing its own proper wine and oil,
 By grafting into it the stranger-vine,
 Which sucks its heart out, sly and serpentine,
 Till forth one vine-palm feathers to the root,
 And red drops moisten the insipid fruit.
 Once Adelaide set on,—the subtle mate
 Of the weak soldier, urged to emulate
 The Church's valiant women deed for deed,
 And paragon her namesake, win the meed
 O' the great Matilda,—soon they overbore
 The rest of Lombardy,—not as before
 By an instinctive truculence, but patched
 The Kaiser's strategy until it matched
 The Pontiff's, sought old ends by novel means.
 "Only, why is it Salinguerra screens
 "Himself behind Romano?—him we bade
 "Enjoy our shine i' the front, not seek the shade!"
 —Asked Heinrich, somewhat of the tardiest
 To comprehend. Nor Philip acquiesced
 At once in the arrangement ; reasoned, plied
 His friend with offers of another bride,
 A statelier function—fruitlessly : 't was plain
 Taurello through some weakness must remain
 Obscure. And Otho, free to judge of both

—Ecelin the unready, harsh and loth,
And this more plausible and facile wight
With every point a-sparkle—chose the right,
Admiring how his predecessors harped
On the wrong man: “thus,” quoth he, “wits are warped
“By outsides!” Carelessly, meanwhile, his life
Suffered its many turns of peace and strife
In many lands—you hardly could surprise
The man; who shamed Sordello (recognize !)
In this as much beside, that, unconcerned
What qualities were natural or earned,
With no ideal of graces, as they came
He took them, singularly well the same—
Speaking the Greek’s own language, just because
Your Greek eludes you, leave the least of flaws
In contracts with him; while, since Arab lore
Holds the stars’ secret—take one trouble more
And master it! ’T is done, and now deter
Who may the Tuscan, once Jove trined for her,
From Friedrich’s path!—Friedrich, whose pilgrimage
The same man puts aside, whom he ’ll engage
To leave next year John Brienne in the lurch,
Come to Bassano, see Saint Francis’ church
And judge of Guido the Bolognian’s piece
Which,—lend Taurello credit,—rivals Greece—
Angels, with aureoles like golden quoits

Pitched home, applauding Ecelin's exploits.
For elegance, he strung the angelot,
Made rhymes thereto ; for prowess, clove he not
Tiso, last siege, from crest to crupper? Why
Detail you thus a varied mastery
But to show how Taurello, on the watch
For men, to read their hearts and thereby catch
Their capabilities and purposes,
Displayed himself so far as displayed these :
While our Sordello only cared to know
About men as a means whereby he 'd show
Himself, and men had much or little worth
According as they kept in or drew forth
That self ; the other's choicest instruments
Surmised him shallow.

Meantime, malcontents

Dropped off, town after town grew wiser. "How
"Change the world's face?" asked people ; "as 't is now
"It has been, will be ever : very fine
"Subjecting things profane to things divine,
"In talk ! This contumacy will fatigue
"The vigilance of Este and the League !
"The Ghibellins gain on us !"—as it happened.
Old Azzo and old Boniface, entrapped
By Ponte Alto, both in one month's space
Slept at Verona : either left a brace

Of sons—but, three years after, either's pair
Lost Guglielm and Aldobrand its heir :
Azzo remained and Richard—all the stay
Of Este and Saint Boniface, at bay
As 't were. Then, either Ecelin grew old
Or his brain altered—not o' the proper mould
For new appliances—his old palm-stoek
Endured no influx of strange strengths. He 'd rock
As in a drunkenness, or chuckle low
As proud of the completeness of his woe,
Then weep real tears ;—now make some mad onslaught
On Este, heedless of the lesson taught
So painfully,—now cringe for peace, sue peace
At price of past gain, bar of fresh increase
To the fortunes of Romano. Up at last
Rose Este, down Romano sank as fast.
And men remarked these freaks of peace and war
Happened while Salinguerra was afar :
Whence every friend besought him, all in vain,
To use his old adherent's wits again.
Not he !—“ who had advisers in his sons,
“ Could plot himself, nor needed any one's
“ Advice.” 'T was Adelaide's remaining staunch
Prevented his destruction root and branch
Forthwith ; but when she died, doom fell, for gay
He made alliances, gave lands away

To whom it pleased accept them, and withdrew
For ever from the world. Taurello, who
Was summoned to the convent, then refused
A word at the wicket, patience thus abused,
Promptly threw off alike his imbecile
Ally's yoke, and his own frank, foolish smile.
Soon a few movements of the happier sort
Changed matters, put himself in men's report
As heretofore ; he had to fight, beside,
And that became him ever. So, in pride
And flushing of this kind of second youth,
He dealt a good-will blow. Este in truth
Lay prone— and men remembered, somewhat late,
A laughing old outrageous stifled hate
He bore to Este—how it would outbreak
At times spite of disguise, like an earthquake
In sunny weather—as that noted day
When with his hundred friends he tried to slay
Azzo before the Kaiser's face : and how,
On Azzo's calm refusal to allow
A liegeman's challenge, straight he too was calmed :
As if his hate could bear to lie embalmed,
Bricked up, the moody Pharaoh, and survive
All intermediate crumbings, to arrive
At earth's catastrophe—'t was Este's crash
Not Azzo's he demanded, so, no rash

Procedure ! Este's true antagonist
Rose out of Ecelin : all voices whist,
All eyes were sharpened, wits predicted. He
'T was, leaned in the embrasure absently,
Amused with his own efforts, now, to trace
With his steel-sheathed forefinger Friedrich's face
I' the dust : but as the trees waved, sere, his smile
Deepened, and words expressed its thought erewhile.

“ Ay, fairly housed at last, my old compeer?
“ That we should stick together, all the year
“ I kept Vicenza !—How old Boniface,
“ Old Azzo caught us in its market-place,
“ He by that pillar, I at this,—caught each
“ In mid swing, more than fury of his speech,
“ Egging the rabble on to disavow
“ Allegiance to their Marquis—Bacchus, how
“ They boasted ! Ecelin must turn their drudge,
“ Nor, if released, will Salinguerra grudge
“ Paying arrears of tribute due long since—
“ Bacchus ! My man could promise then, nor wince
“ The bones-and-muscles ! Sound of wind and limb,
“ Spoke he the set excuse I framed for him :
“ And now he sits me, slaving and mute,
“ Intent on chafing each starved purple foot
“ Benumbed past aching with the altar slab :
“ Will no vein throb there when some monk shall blab

“Spitefully to the circle of bald scalps,
“ ‘ Friedrich ’s affirmed to be our side the Alps ’
“ —Eh, brother Lactance, brother Anaclet?
“ Sworn to abjure the world, its fume and fret,
“ God’s own now? Drop the dormitory bar,
“ Enfold the scanty grey serge scapular
“ Twice o’er the cowl to muffle memories out !
“ So ! But the midnight whisper turns a shout,
“ Eyes wink, mouths open, pulses circulate
“ In the stone walls : the past, the world you hate
“ Is with you, ambush, open field—or see
“ The surging flame—we fire Vicenza—glee !
“ Follow, let Pilo and Bernardo chafe !
“ Bring up the Mantuans—through San Biagio—safe !
“ Ah, the mad people waken? Ah, they writhe
“ And reach us? If they block the gate? No tithe
“ Can pass— keep back, you Bassanese ! The edge,
“ Use the edge—shear, thrust, hew, melt down the wedge,
“ Let out the black of those black upturned eyes !
“ Hell—are they sprinkling fire too? The blood fries
“ And hisses on your brass gloves as they tear
“ Those upturned faces choking with despair.
“ Brave ! Slidder through the reeking gate ! ‘How now?
“ ‘ You six had charge of her?’ And then the vow
“ Comes, and the foam spirts, hair’s plucked, till one
shrick

“(I hear it) and you fling—you cannot speak—
“Your gold-flowered basnet to a man who haled
“The Adelaide he dared scarce view unveiled
“This morn, naked across the fire : how crown
“The archer that exhausted lays you down
“Your infant, smiling at the flame, and dies?
“While one, while mine . . .

“Bacchus! I think there lies
“More than one corpse there” (and he paced the room)
“—Another cinder somewhere: ’t was my doom
“Beside, my doom! If Adelaide is dead,
“I live the same, this Azzo lives instead
“Of that to me, and we pull, any how,
“Este into a heap: the matter ’s now
“At the true juncture slipping us so oft.
“Ay, Heinrich died and Otho, please you, doffed
“His crown at such a juncture! Still, if hold
“Our Friedrich’s purpose, if this chain enfold
“The neck of . . . who but this same Ecelin
“That must recoil when the best days begin!
“Recoil? that ’s nought; if the recoiler leaves
“His name for me to fight with, no one grieves:
“But he must interfere, forsooth, unlock
“His cloister to become my stumbling-block
“Just as of old! Ay, ay, there ’t is again—
“The land’s inevitable Head—explain

“The reverences that subject us! Count
“These Ecelins now! Not to say as fount,
“Originating power of thought,—from twelve
“That drop i’ the trenches they joined hands to delve,
“Six shall surpass him, but . . . why men must twine
“Somehow with something! Ecelin ’s a fine
“Clear name! ’Twere simpler, doubtless, twine with me
“At once: our cloistered friend’s capacity
“Was of a sort! I had to share myself
“In fifty portions, like an o’ertasked elf
“That ’s forced illume in fifty points the vast
“Rare vapour he ’s environed by. At last
“My strengths, though sorely frittered, c’en converge
“And crown . . . no, Bacchus, they have yet to urge
“The man be crowned!

“That aloe, an he durst,
“Would climb! Just such a bloated sprawler first
“I noted in Messina’s castle-court
“The day I came, when Heinrich asked in sport
“If I would pledge my faith to win him back
“His right in Lombardy: ‘for, once bid pack
“‘Marauders,’ he continued, ‘in my stead
“‘You rule, Taurello!’ and upon this head
“Laid the silk glove of Constance—I see her
“Too, mantled head to foot in miniver,
“Retrude following!

“ I am absolved
“ From further toil : the empery devolved
“ On me, ’t was Tito’s word : I have to lay
“ For once my plan, pursue my plan my way,
“ Prompt nobody, and render an account
“ Taurello to Taurello ! Nay, I mount
“ To Friedrich : he conceives the post I kept,
“ —Who did true service, able or inept,
“ Who ’s worthy guerdon, Ecelin or I.
“ Me guerdoned, counsel follows : would he vie
“ With the Pope really? Azzo, Boniface
“ Compose a right-arm Hohenstauffen’s race
“ Must break ere govern Lombardy. I point
“ How easy ’t were to twist, once out of joint,
“ The socket from the bone : my Azzo’s stare
“ Meanwhile ! for I, this idle strap to wear,
“ Shall—fret myself abundantly, what end
“ To serve? There ’s left me twenty years to spend
“ —How better than my old way? Had I one
“ Who laboured overthrow my work—a son
“ Hatching with Azzo superb treachery,
“ To root my pines up and then poison me,
“ Suppose—’t were worth while frustrate that ! Beside,
“ Another life’s ordained me : the world’s tide
“ Rolls, and what hope of parting from the press
“ Of waves, a single wave though weariness

"Gently lifted aside, laid upon shore?
 "My life must be lived out in foam and roar,
 "No question. Fifty years the province held
 "Taurello ; troubles raised, and troubles quelled,
 "He in the midst—who leaves this quaint stone
 place,
 "These trees a year or two, then not a trace
 "Of him ! How obtain hold, fetter men's tongues
 "Like this poor minstrel with the foolish songs—
 "To which, despite our bustle, he is linked?
 "—Flowers one may teaze, that never grow extinct.
 "Ay, that patch, surely, green as ever, where
 "I set Her Moorish lentisk, by the stair,
 "To overawe the aloes ; and we trod
 "Those flowers, how call you such?—into the sod ;
 "A stately foreigner—a world of pain
 "To make it thrive, arrest rough winds—all vain !
 "It would decline ; these would not be destroyed :
 "And now, where is it? where can you avoid
 "The flowers? I frighten children twenty years
 "Longer !—which way, too, Ecclin appears
 "To thwart me, for his son's besotted youth
 "Gives promise of the proper tiger-tooth :
 "They feel it at Vicenza ! Fate, fate, fate,
 "My fine Taurello ! Go you, promulgate
 "Friedrich's decree, and here 's shall aggrandise

“Young Ecelin—your Prefect’s badge ! a prize

“Too precious, certainly.

“How now? Compete

“With my old comrade? shuffle from their seat

“His children? Paltry dealing ! Do n’t I know

“Ecelin? now, I think, and years ago !

“What ’s changed—the weakness? did not I compound

“For that, and undertake to keep him sound

“Despite it? Here ’s Taurello hankering

“After a boy’s preferment—this plaything

“To carry, Bacchus !” And he laughed.

Remark

Why schemes wherein cold-blooded men embark

Prosper, when your enthusiastic sort

Fail : while these last are ever stopping short—

(So much they should—so little they can do !)

The careless tribe see nothing to pursue

If they desist ; meantime their scheme succeeds.

Thoughts were caprices in the course of deeds

Methodic with Taurello ; so, he turned,—

Enough amused by fancies fairly earned

Of Este’s horror-struck submitted neck,

And Richard, the cowed braggart, at his beck,—

To his own petty but immediate doubt

If he could pacify the League without

Conceding Richard ; just to this was brought

That interval of vain discursive thought !
As, shall I say, some Ethiop, past pursuit
Of all enslavers, dips a shackled foot
Burnt to the blood, into the drowsy black
Enormous watercourse which guides him back
To his own tribe again, where he is king ;
And laughs because he guesses, numbering
The yellower poison-wattles on the pouch
Of the first lizard wrested from its couch
Under the slime (whose skin, the while, he strips
To cure his nostril with, and festered lips,
And eyeballs bloodshot through the desert-blast)
That he has reached its boundary, at last
May breathe ;—thinks o'er enchantments of the South
Sovereign to plague his enemies, their mouth,
Eyes, nails, and hair ; but, these enchantments tried
In fancy, puts them soberly aside
For truth, projects a cool return with friends,
The likelihood of winning mere amends
Ere long ; thinks that, takes comfort silently,
Then, from the river's brink, his wrongs and he,
Hugging revenge close to their hearts, are soon
Off-striding for the Mountains of the Moon.

Midnight : the watcher nodded on his spear,
Since clouds dispersing left a passage clear
For any meagre and discoloured moon

To venture forth ; and such was peering soon
Above the harassed city—her close lanes
Closer, not half so tapering her fanes,
As though she shrunk into herself to keep
What little life was saved, more safely. Heap
By heap the watch-fires mouldered, and beside
The blackest spoke Sordello and replied
Palma with none to listen. “ ’T is your cause :
“ What makes a Ghibellin? There should be laws—
“ (Remember how my youth escaped ! I trust
“ To you for manhood, Palma ! tell me just
“ As any child)—there must be laws at work
“ Explaining this. Assure me, good may lurk
“ Under the bad,—my multitude has part
“ In your designs, their welfare is at heart
“ With Salinguerra, to their interest
“ Refer the deeds he dwelt on,—so divest
“ Our conference of much that scared me. Why
“ Affect that heartless tone to Tito? I
“ Esteemed myself, yes, in my inmost mind
“ This morn, a recreant to my race—mankind
“ O’erlooked till now : why boast my spirit’s force,
“ —Such force denied its object? why divorce
“ These, then admire my spirit’s flight the same
“ As though it bore up, helped some half-orbed flame
“ Else quenched in the dead void, to living space?

"That orb cast off to chaos and disgrace,
 "Why vaunt so much my unencumbered dance,
 "Making a feat's facilities enhance
 "Its marvel? But I front Taurello, one
 "Of happier fate, and all I should have done,
 "He does; the people's good being paramount
 "With him, their progress may perhaps account
 "For his abiding still; whereas you heard
 "The talk with Tito—the excuse preferred
 "For burning those five hostages,—and broached
 "By way of blind, as you and I approached,
 "I do believe."

She spoke: then he, "My thought
 "Plainlier expressed! All to your profit—nought
 "Meantime of these, of conquests to achieve
 "For them, of wretchedness he might relieve
 "While profiting your party. Azzo, too,
 "Supports a cause: what cause? Do Guelfs pursue
 "Their ends by means like yours, or better?"

When

The Guelfs were proved alike, men weighed with men,
 And deed with deed, blaze, blood, with blood and blaze,
 Morn broke: "Once more, Sordello, meet its gaze
 "Proudly—the people's charge against thee fails
 "In every point, while either party quails!
 "These are the busy ones: be silent thou!

"Two parties take the world up, and allow
 "No third, yet have one principle, subsist
 "By the same injustice ; whoso shall enlist
 "With either, ranks with man's inveterate foes.
 "So there is one less quarrel to compose :
 "The Guelf, the Ghibellin may be to curse—
 "I have done nothing, but both sides do worse
 "Than nothing. Nay, to me, forgotten, reft
 "Of insight, lapped by trees and flowers, was left
 "The notion of a service—ha? What lured
 "Me here, what mighty aim was I assured
 "Must move Taurello? What if there remained
 "A cause, intact, distinct from these, ordained
 "For me, its true discoverer?"

Some one pressed

Before them here, a watcher, to suggest
 The subject for a ballad : "They must know
 "The tale of the dead worthy, long ago
 "Consul of Rome—that's long ago for us,
 "Minstrels and bowmen, idly squabbling thus
 "In the world's corner—but too late no doubt,
 "For the brave time he sought to bring about.
 "—Not know Crescentius Nomentanus?" Then
 He cast about for terms to tell him, when
 Sordello disavowed it, how they used
 Whenever their Superior introduced

A novice to the Brotherhood—("for I
" Was just a brown-sleeve brother, merrily
" Appointed too," quoth he, "till Innocent
" Bade me relinquish, to my small content,
" My wife or my brown sleeves")—some brother spoke
Ere nocturns of Crescentius, to revoke
The edict issued, after his demise,
Which blotted fame alike and effigies,
All out except a floating power, a name
Including, tending to produce the same
Great act. Rome, dead, forgotten, lived at least
Within that brain, though to a vulgar priest
And a vile stranger,—two not worth a slave
Of Rome's, Pope John, King Otho,—fortune gave
The rule there: so, Crescentius, haply dressed
In white, called Roman Consul for a jest,
Taking the people at their word, forth stepped
As upon Brutus' heel, nor ever kept
Rome waiting,—stood erect, and from his brain
Gave Rome out on its ancient place again,
Ay, bade proceed with Brutus' Rome, Kings styled
Themselves mere citizens of, and, beguiled
Into great thoughts thereby, would choose the gem
Out of a lapfull, spoil their diadem
—The Senate's cypher was so hard to scratch
He flashes like a phanal, all men catch

The flame, Rome's just accomplished ! when returned
 Otho, with John, the Consul's step had spurned,
 And Hugo Lord of Este, to redress
 The wrongs of each. Crescentius in the stress
 Of adverse fortune bent. " They crucified
 " Their Consul in the Forum ; and abide
 " E'er since such slaves at Rome, that I—(for I
 " Was once a brown-sleeve brother, merrily
 " Appointed)—I had option to keep wife
 " Or keep brown sleeves, and managed in the strife
 " Lose both. A song of Rome ! "

And Rome, indeed,

Robed at Goito in fantastic weed,
 The Mother-City of his Mantuan days,
 Looked an established point of light whence rays
 Traversed the world ; for, all the clustered homes
 Beside of men, seemed bent on being Romes
 In their degree ; the question was, how each
 Should most resemble Rome, clean out of reach.
 Nor, of the Two, did either principle
 Struggle to change, but to possess Rome,—still
 Guelf Rome or Ghibellin Rome.

Let Rome advance !

Rome, as she struck Sordello's ignorance—
 How could he doubt one moment ? Rome's the Cause !
 Rome of the Pandects, all the world's new laws—

Of the Capitol, of Castle Angelo ;
New structures, that inordinately glow,
Subdued, brought back to harmony, made ripe
By many a relic of the archetype
Extant for wonder ; every upstart church
That hoped to leave old temples in the lurch,
Corrected by the Theatre forlorn
That,—as a mundane shell, its world late born,—
Lay and o'ershadowed it. These hints combined,
Rome typifies the scheme to put mankind
Once more in full possession of their rights.
“ Let us have Rome again ! On me it lights
“ To build up Rome—on me, the first and last :
“ For such a future was endured the past ! ”
And thus, in the grey twilight, forth he sprung
To give his thought consistency among
The very People—let their facts avail
Finish the dream grown from the archer's tale.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

Is it the same Sordello in the dusk
As at the dawn?—merely a perished husk
Now, that arose a power fit to build
Up Rome again? The proud conception chilled
So soon? Ay, watch that latest dream of thine
—A Rome indebted to no Palatine—
Drop arch by arch, Sordello! Art possessed
Of thy wish now, rewarded for thy quest
To-day among Ferrara's squalid sons?
Are this and this and this the shining ones
Meet for the Shining City? Sooth to say,
Your favoured tenantry pursue their way
After a fashion! This companion slips
On the smooth causey, t' other blinkard trips
At his mooned sandal. "Leave to lead the brawls
"Here i' the atria?" No, friend! He that sprawls
On aught but a stibadium . . . what his dues
Who puts the lustral vase to such an use?

Oh, huddle up the day's disasters ! March,
Ye runagates, and drop thou, arch by arch,
Rome !

Yet before they quite disband—a whim—
Study mere shelter, now, for him, and him,
Nay, even the worst,—just house them ! Any cave
Suffices : throw out earth ! A loophole ? Brave !
They ask to feel the sun shine, see the grass
Grow, hear the larks sing ? Dead art thou, alas,
And I am dead ! But here's our son excels
At hurdle-weaving any Scythian, fells
Oak and devises rafters, dreams and shapes
His dream into a door-post, just escapes
The mystery of hinges. Lie we both
Perdue another age. The goodly growth
Of brick and stone ! Our building-pelt was rough,
But that descendant's garb suits well enough
A portico-contriver. Speed the years—
What's time to us ? At last, a city rears
Itself ! nay, enter—what's the grave to us ?
Lo, our forlorn acquaintance carry thus
The head ! Successively sewer, forum, cirque—
Last age, an aqueduct was counted work,
But now they tire the artificer upon
Blank alabaster, black obsidion,
—Careful, Jove's face be duly fulgorant,

And mother Venus' kiss-creased nipples pant
Back into pristine pulpiness, ere fixed
Above the baths. What difference betwixt
This Rome and ours—resemblance what, between
That scurvy dumb-show and this pageant sheen—
These Romans and our rabble? Use thy wit !
The work marched: step by step,—a workman fit
Took each, nor too fit,—to one task, one time,—
No leaping o'er the petty to the prime,
When just the substituting osier lithe
For brittle bulrush, sound wood for soft withe,
To further loam-and-roughcast-work a stage,—
Exacts an architect, exacts an age :
No tables of the Mauritanian tree
For men whose maple log's their luxury !
That way was Rome built. “ Better ” (say you) “ merge
“ At once all workmen in the demiurge,
“ All epochs in a lifetime, every task
“ In one ! ” So should the sudden city bask
I' the day—while those we 'd feast there, want the knack
Of keeping fresh-chalked gowns from speck and brack,
Distinguish not rare peacock from vile swan,
Nor Mareotic juice from Cæcuban.
“ Enough of Rome ! ’T was happy to conceive
“ Rome on a sudden, nor shall fate bereave
“ Me of that credit : for the rest, her spite

"Is an old story—serves my folly right
"By adding yet another to the dull
"List of abortions—things proved beautiful
"Could they be done, Sordello cannot do."

He sat upon the terrace, plucked and threw
The powdery aloe-cusps away, saw shift
Rome's walls, and drop arch after arch, and drift
Mist-like afar those pillars of all stripe,
Mounds of all majesty. "Thou archetype,
"Last of my dreams and loveliest, depart!"

And then a low voice wound into his heart :
"Sordello!" (low as some old Pythoness
Conceding to a Lydian King's distress
The cause of his long error—one mistake
Of her past oracle) "Sordello, wake!
"God has conceded two sights to a man—
"One, of men's whole work, time's completed plan,
"The other, of the minute's work, man's first
"Step to the plan's completeness: what's dispersed
"Save hope of that supreme step which, descried
"Earliest, was meant still to remain untried
"Only to give you heart to take your own
"Step, and there stay, leaving the rest alone?
"Where is the vanity? Why count as one
"The first step, with the last step? What is gone
"Except Rome's æry magnificence,

"That last step you 'd take first?—an evidence
"You were God : be man now ! Let those glances fall !
"The basis, the beginning step of all,
"Which proves you just a man—is that gone too?
"Pity to disconcert one versed as you
"In fate's ill-nature ! but its full extent
"Eludes Sordello, even : the veil rent,
"Read the black writing—that collective man
"Outstrips the individual. Who began
"The acknowledged greatnesses? Ay, your own art
"Shall serve us : put the poet's mimes apart—
"Close with the poet's self, and lo, a dim
"Yet too plain form divides itself from him !
"Alcamo's song enmeshes the lulled Isle,
"Woven into the echoes left erewhile
"By Nina, one soft web of song : no more
"Turning his name, then, flower-like o'er and o'er !
"An elder poet in the younger's place ;
"Nina's the strength, but Alcamo's the grace :
"Each neutralizes each then ! Search your fill ;
"You get no whole and perfect Poet—still
"New Ninas, Alcamos, till time's mid-night
"Shrouds all—or better say, the shutting light
"Of a forgotten yesterday. Dissect
"Every ideal workman—(to reject
"In favour of your fearful ignorance

"The thousand phantasms eager to advance,
 "And point you but to those within your reach)—
 "Were you the first who brought—(in modern speech)
 "The Multitude to be materialized ?
 "That loose eternal unrest—who devised
 "An apparition i' the midst? The rout
 "Was checked, a breathless ring was formed about
 "That sudden flower : get round at any risk
 "The gold-rough pointel, silver-blazing disk
 "O' the lily! Swords across it! Reign thy reign
 "And serve thy frolic service, Charlemagne !
 "—The very child of over-joyousness,
 "Unfeeling thence, strong therefore : Strength by stress
 "Of Strength comes of that forehead confident,
 "Those widened eyes expecting heart's content,
 "A calm as out of just-quelled noise ; nor swerves
 "For doubt, the ample cheek in gracious curves
 "Abutting on the upthrust nether lip :
 "He wills, how should he doubt then ? Ages slip :
 "Was it Sordello pried into the work
 "So far accomplished, and discovered lurk
 "A company amid the other clans,
 "Only distinct in priests for castellans
 "And popes for suzerains (their rule confessed
 "Its rule, their interest its interest,
 "Living for sake of living—there an end,—

“Wrapt in itself, no energy to spend
“In making adversaries or allies)—
“Dived you into its capabilities
“And dared create, out of that sect, a soul
“Should turn a multitude, already whole,
“Into its body? Speak plainer! Is ’t so sure
“God’s church lives by a King’s investiture?
“Look to last step! A staggering—a shock—
“What ’s mere sand is demolished, while the rock
“Endures: a column of black fiery dust
“Blots heaven—that help was prematurely thrust
“Aside, perchance!—but air clears, nought ’s erased
“Of the true outline. Thus much being firm based,
“The other was a scaffold. See him stand
“Buttressed upon his mattock, Hildebrand
“Of the huge brain-mask welded ply o’er ply
“As in a forge; it buries either eye
“White and extinct, that stupid brow; teeth clenched,
“The neck tight-corded, too, the chin deep-trenched,
“As if a cloud enveloped him while fought
“Under its shade, grim prizers, thought with thought
“At dead-lock, agonizing he, until
“The victor thought leap radiant up, and Will,
“The slave with folded arms and drooping lids
“They fought for, lean forth flame-like as it bids.
“Call him no flower—a mandrake of the earth,

" Thwarted and dwarfed and blasted in its birth,
 " Rather,—a fruit of suffering's excess,
 " Thence feeling, therefore stronger : still by stress
 " Of Strength, work Knowledge ! Full three hundred
 years
 " Have men to wear away in smiles and tears
 " Between the two•that nearly seemed to touch,
 " Observe you ! quit one workman and you clutch
 " Another, letting both their trains go by—
 " The actors-out of either's policy,
 " Heinrich, on this hand, Otho, Barbaross,
 " Carry the three Imperial crowns across,
 " Aix' Iron, Milan's Silver, and Rome's Gold—
 " While Alexander, Innocent uphold
 " On that, each Papal key—but, link on link,
 " Why is it neither chain betrays a chink ?
 " How coalesce the small and great ? Alack,
 " For one thrust forward, fifty such fall back !
 " Do the popes coupled there help Gregory
 " Alone ? Hark—from the hermit Peter's cry
 " At Claremont, down to the first serf that says
 " Friedrich 's no liege of his while he delays
 " Getting the Pope's curse off him ! The Crusade—
 " Or trick of breeding Strength by other aid
 " Than Strength, is safe. Hark—from the wild harangue
 " Of Vimmercato, to the carroch's clang

“Yonder! The League—or trick of turning Strength
“Against Pernicious Strength, is safe at length.
“Yet hark—from Mantuan Albert making cease
“The fierce ones, to Saint Francis preaching peace
“Yonder! God’s Truce—or trick to supersede
“The very Use of Strength, is safe. Indeed
“We trench upon the future. Who *is* found
“To take next step, next age—trail o’er the ground—
“Shall I say, gourd-like?—not the flower’s display
“Nor the root’s prowess, but the plenteous way
“O’ the plant—produced by joy and sorrow, whence
“Unfeeling and yet feeling, strongest thence?
“Knowledge by stress of merely Knowledge? No—
“E’en were Sordello ready to forego
“His life for this, ’t were overleaping work
“Some one has first to do, howe’er it irk,
“Nor stray a foot’s breadth from the beaten road.
“Who means to help must still support the load
“Hildebrand lifted—‘why hast Thou,’ he groaned,
“‘Imposed on me a burthen, Paul had moaned,
“‘And Moses dropped beneath?’ Much done—and yet
“Doubtless that grandest task God ever set
“On man, left much to do: at his arm’s wrench,
“Charlemagne’s scaffold fell; but pillars blench
“Merely, start back again—perchance have been
“Taken for buttresses: crash every screen,

“ Hammer the tenons better, and engage
“ A gang about your work, for the next age
“ Or two, of Knowledge, part by Strength and part
“ By Knowledge ! ‘Then, indeed, perchance may start
“ Sordello on his race—would time divulge
“ Such secrets ! If one step’s awry, one bulge
“ Calls for correction by a step we thought
“ Got over long since, why, till that is wrought,
“ No progress ! And the scaffold in its turn
“ Becomes, its service o’er, a thing to spurn.
“ Meanwhile, if your half-dozen years of life
“ In store dispose you to forego the strife,
“ Who takes exception ? Only bear in mind
“ Ferrara ’s reached, Goito ’s left behind :
“ As you then were, as half yourself, desist !
“ —The warrior-part of you may, an it list,
“ Finding real faulchions difficult to poise,
“ Fling them afar and taste the cream of joys
“ By wielding such in fancy,—what is bard
“ Of you may spurn the vehicle that marred
“ Elys so much, and in free fancy glut
“ His sense, yet write no verses—you have but
“ To please yourself for law, and once could please
“ What once appeared yourself, by dreaming these
“ Rather than doing these, in days gone by.
“ But all is changed the moment you descry

“ Mankind as half yourself, — then, fancy’s trade
“ Ends once and always : how may half evade
“ The other half? men are found half of you.
“ Out of a thousand helps, just one or two
“ Can be accomplished presently : but flinch
“ From these (as from the faulchion, raised an inch,
“ Elys, described a couplet) and make proof
“ Of fancy, — then, while one half lolls aloof
“ I’ the vines, completing Rome to the tip-top —
“ See if, for that, your other half will stop
“ A tear, begin a smile ! The rabble’s woes,
“ Ludicrous in their patience as they chose
“ To sit about their town and quietly
“ Be slaughtered, — the poor reckless soldiery,
“ With their ignoble rhymes on Richard, how
“ ‘ Polt-foot,’ sang they, ‘ was in a pitfall now,’
“ Cheering each other from the engine-mounts, —
“ That crippled spawling idiot who recounts
“ How, lopped of limbs, he lay, stupid as stone,
“ Till the pains crept from out him one by one,
“ And wriggles round the archers on his head
“ To earn a morsel of their chestnut bread, —
“ And Cino, always in the self-same place
“ Weeping ; beside that other wretch’s case,
“ Eyepits to ear, one gangrene since he plied
“ The engine in his coat of raw sheep’s hide

"A double watch in the noon sun ; and see
"Lucchino, beauty, with the favours free,
"Trim hacqueton, spruce beard and scented hair,
"Campaigning it for the first time—cut there
"In two already, boy enough to crawl
"For latter orpine round the southern wall,
"Tomà, where Richard's kept, because that whore
"Marfisa, the fool never saw before,
"Sickened for flowers this wearisomest siege :
"And Tiso's wife—men liked their pretty liege,
"Cared for her least of whims once,—Berta, wed
"A twelvemonth gone, and, now poor Tiso's dead,
"Delivering herself of his first child
"On that chance heap of wet filth, reconciled
"To fifty gazers !"—(Here a wind below
Made moody music augural of woe
From the pine barrier)—"What if, now the scene
"Draws to a close, yourself have really been
"—You, plucking purples in Goito's moss
"Like edges of a trabea (not to cross
"Your consul-humour) or dry aloe-shafts
"For fasces, at Ferrara—he, fate wafts,
"This very age, her whole inheritance
"Of opportunities? Yet you advance
"Upon the last ! Since talking is your trade,

"There 's Salinguerra left you to persuade :

"Fail ! then"—

"No—no—which latest chance secure ! "

Leaped up and cried Sordello : " this made sure,

" The past were yet redeemable ; its work

" Was—help the Guelfs, whom I, howe'er it irk,

" Thus help ! " He shook the foolish aloof-haulm

Out of his doublet, paused, proceeded calm

To the appointed presence. The large head

Turned on its socket ; " And your spokesman," said

The large voice, " is Elcorte's happy sprout ?

" Few such"—(so finishing a speech no doubt

Addressed to Palma, silent at his side)

"—My sober councils have diversified.

" Elcorte's son ! good : forward as you may,

" Our lady's minstrel with so much to say ! "

The hesitating sunset floated back,

Rosily traversed in the wonted track

The chamber, from the lattice o'er the girth

Of pines, to the huge eagle blacked in earth

Opposite,—outlined sudden, spur to crest,

That solid Salinguerra, and caressed

Palma's contour ; 't was day looped back night's pall ;

Sordello had a chance left spite of all.

And much he made of the convincing speech

Meant to compensate for the past and reach

Through his youth's daybreak of unprofit, quite
To his noon's labour, so proceed till night
Leisurely! The great argument to bind
Taurello with the Guelf Cause, body and mind,
—Came the consummate rhetoric to that?
Yet most Sordello's argument dropped flat
Through his accustomed fault of breaking yoke,
Disjoining him who felt from him who spoke.
Was 't not a touching incident—so prompt
A rendering the world its just accompt,
Once proved its debtor? Who 'd suppose, before
This proof, that he, Goito's god of yore,
At duty's instance could demean himself
So memorably, dwindle to a Guelf?
Be sure, in such delicious flattery steeped,
His inmost self at the out-portion peeped,
Thus occupied; then stole a glance at those
Appealed to, curious if her colour rose
Or his lip moved, while he discreetly urged
The need of Lombardy becoming purged
At soonest of her barons; the poor part
Abandoned thus, missing the blood at heart
And spirit in brain, unseasonably off
Elsewhere! But, though his speech was worthy scoff,
Good-humoured Salinguerra, famed for tact
And tongue, who, careless of his phrase, ne'er lacked

The right phrase, and harangued Honorius dumb
 At his accession,—looked as all fell plumb
 To purpose and himself found interest
 In every point his new instructor pressed
 —Left playing with the rescript's white wax seal
 To scrutinize Sordello head and heel.
 He means to yield assent sure? No, alas !
 All he replied was, "What, it comes to pass
 "That poesy, sooner than politics,
 "Makes fade young hair?" To think such speech could
 fix
 Taurello !

 Then a flash of bitter truth :
 So fantasies could break and fritter youth
 That he had long ago lost earnestness,
 Lost will to work, lost power to even express
 The need of working ! Earth was turned a grave :
 No more occasions now, though he should crave
 Just one, in right of superhuman toil,
 To do what was undone, repair such spoil,
 Alter the past—nothing would give the chance !
 Not that he was to die ; he saw askance
 Protract the ignominious years beyond
 To dream in—time to hope and time despond,
 Remember and forget, be sad, rejoice
 As saved a trouble ; he might, at his choice,

One way or other, idle life out, drop
No few smooth verses by the way—for prop,
A thyrsus, these sad people, all the same,
Should pick up, and set store by,—far from blame,
Plant o'er his hearse, convinced his better part
Survived him. “Rather tear men out the heart
“O' the truth!”—Sordello muttered, and renewed
His propositions for the Multitude.

But Salinguerra, who at this attack
Had thrown great breast and ruffling corslet back
To hear the better, smilingly resumed
His task; beneath, the carroch's warning boomed;
He must decide with Tito; courteously
He turned then, even seeming to agree
With his admonisher—“Assist the Pope,
“Extend Guelf domination, fill the scope
“O' the Church, thus based on All, by All, for All—
“Change Secular to Evangelical”—
Echoing his very sentence: all seemed lost,
When suddenly he looked up, laughingly almost,
To Palma: “This opinion of your friend's—
“For instance, would it answer Palma's ends?
“Best, were it not, turn Guelf, submit our Strength”—
(Here he drew out his baldric to its length)
—“To the Pope's Knowledge—let our captive slip,
“Wide to the walls throw ope our gates, equip

"Azzo with . . . what I hold here ! Who 'll subscribe
 "To a trite censure of the minstrel tribe
 "Henceforward? or pronounce, as Heinrich used,
 " 'Spear-heads for battle, burr-heads for the joust ' '
 " —When Constance, for his couplets, would promote
 "Alcamo, from a parti-coloured coat,
 "To holding her lord's stirrup in the wars.
 "Not that I see where couplet-making jars
 "With common sense : at Mantua I had borne
 "This chanted, better than their most forlorn
 "Of bull-baits,—that 's indisputable ! "

Brave!

Whom vanity nigh slew, contempt shall save !
 All 's at an end : a Troubadour suppose
 Mankind will class him with their friends or foes?
 A puny uncouth ailing vassal think
 The world and him bound in some special link?
 Abrupt the visionary tether burst.
 What were rewarded here, or what amerced
 If a poor drudge, solicitous to dream
 Deservingly, got tangled by his theme
 So far as to conceit the knack or gift
 Or whatsoever it be, of verse, might lift
 The globe, a lever like the hand and head
 Of—"Men of Action," as the Jongleurs said,
 —"The Great Men," in the people's dialect?

And not a moment did this scorn affect
Sordello : scorn the poet? They, for once,
Asking "what was," obtained a full response.
Bid Naddo think at Mantua—he had but
To look into his promptuary, put
Finger on a set thought in a set speech:
But was Sordello fitted thus for each
Conjecture? Nowise ; since within his soul,
Perception brooded unexpressed and whole.
A healthy spirit like a healthy frame
Craves aliment in plenty—all the same,
Changes, assimilates its aliment.
Perceived Sordello, on a truth intent?
Next day no formularies more you saw
Than figs or olives in a sated maw.
'T is Knowledge, whither such perceptions tend ;
They lose themselves in that, means to an end,
The many old producing some one new,
A last unlike the first. If lies are true,
The Caliph's wheel-work man of brass receives
A meal, munched millet grains and lettuce leaves
Together in his stomach rattle loose ;
• You find them perfect next day to produce :
But ne'er expect the man, on strength of that,
Can roll an iron camel-collar flat
Like Haroun's self ! I tell you, what was stored

Bit by bit through Sordello's life, outpoured
 That eve, was, for that age, a novel thing :
 And round those three the People formed a ring,
 Of visionary judges whose award
 He recognised in full—faces that barred
 Henceforth return to the old careless life,
 In whose great presence, therefore, his first strife
 For their sake must not be ignobly fought ;
 All these, for once, approved of him, he thought,
 Suspended their own vengeance, chose await
 The issue of this strife to reinstate
 Them in the right of taking it—in fact
 He must be proved king ere they could exact
 Vengeance for such king's defalcation. Last,
 A reason why the phrases flowed so fast
 Was in his quite forgetting for a time
 Himself in his amazement that the rhyme
 Disguised the royalty so much : he there—
 And Salinguerra yet all-unaware
 Who was the lord, who liegeman !

“ Thus, I lay

“ On thine my spirit and compel obey

“ His lord,—my liegeman,—impotent to build

“ Another Rome, but hardly so unskilled

“ In what such builder should have been, as brook

“ One shame beyond the charge that I forsook

“His function ! Free me from that shame, I bend
“A brow before, suppose new years to spend,—
“Allow each chance, nor fruitlessly, recur—
“Measure thee with the Minstrel, then, demur
“At any crowd he claims ! That I must cede
“Shamed now, my right to my especial meed—
“Confess thee fitter help the world than I
“Ordained its champion from eternity,
“Is much : but to behold thee scorn the post
“I quit in thy behalf—to hear thee boast
“What makes my own despair !” And while he rung
The changes on this theme, the roof up-sprung,
The sad walls of the presence-chamber died
Into the distance, or embowering vied
With far-away Goito’s vine-frontier ;
And crowds of faces—(only keeping clear
The rose-light in the midst, his vantage-ground
To fight their battle from)—deep clustered round
Sordello, with good wishes no mere breath,
Kind prayers for him no vapour, since, come death
Come life, he was fresh-sinewed every joint,
Each bone new-marrowed as whom gods anoint
Though mortal to their rescue. Now let sprawl
The snaky volumes hither ! Is Typhon all
For Hercules to trample—good report
From Salinguerra only to extort ?

"So was I" (closed he his inculcating
A poet must be earth's essential king)
"So was I, royal so, and if I fail,
"T is not the royalty, ye witness quail,
"But one deposed who, caring not exert
"Its proper essence, trifled malapert
"With accidents instead—good things assigned
"As heralds of a better thing behind—
"And, worthy through display of these, put forth
"Never the inmost all-surpassing worth
"That constitutes him king precisely since
"As yet no other spirit may evince
"Its like: the power he took most pride to test,
"Whereby all forms of life had been professed
"At pleasure, forms already on the earth,
"Was but a means to power beyond, whose birth
"Should, in its novelty, be kingship's proof.
"Now, whether he came near or kept aloof
"The several forms he longed to imitate,
"Not there the kingship lay, he sees too late,
"Those forms, unalterable first as last,
"Proved him her copier, not the protoplast
"Of nature: what would come of being free,
"By action to exhibit tree for tree,
"Bird, beast, for beast and bird, or prove earth bore
"One veritable man or woman more?

" Means to an end, such proofs are : what the end?
 " Let essence, whatsoe'er it be, extend—
 " Never contract. Already you include
 " The multitude ; then let the multitude
 " Include yourself ; and the result were new :
 " Themselves before, the multitude turn you.
 " This were to live and move and have, in them,
 " Your being, and secure a diadem
 " You should transmit (because no cycle yearns
 " Beyond itself, but on itself returns)
 " When, the full sphere in wane, the world o'erlaid
 " Long since with you, shall have in turn obeyed
 " Some orb still prouder, some displayer, still
 " More potent than the last, of human will,
 " And some new king depose the old. Of such
 " Am I—whom pride of this elates too much?
 " Safe, rather say, 'mid troops of peers again ;
 " I, with my words, hailed brother of the train
 " Deeds once sufficed : for, let the world roll back,
 " Who fails, through deeds howe'er diverse, retrack
 " My purpose still, my task? A teeming crust—
 " Air, flame, earth, wave at conflict ! Then, needs must
 " Emerge some Calm embodied, these refer
 " The brawl to—yellow-bearded Jupiter?
 " No ! Saturn ; some existence like a pact
 " And protest against Chaos, some first fact

"I' the faint of time. My deep of life, I know
"Is unavailing e'en to poorly show" . . .
(For here the Chief immeasurably yawned)
. . . "Deeds in their due gradation till Song dawned
"The fullest effluence of the finest mind,
"All in degree, no way diverse in kind
"From minds about it, minds which, more or less,
"Lofty or low, move seeking to impress
"Themselves on somewhat ; but one mind has climbed
"Step after step, by just ascent sublimed.
"Thought is the soul of act, and, stage by stage,
"Soul is from body still to disengage
"As tending to a freedom which rejects
"Such help and incorporeally affects
"The world, producing deeds but not by deeds,
"Swaying, in others, frames itself exceeds,
"Assigning them the simpler tasks it used
"To patiently perform till Song produced
"Acts, by thoughts only, for the mind : divest
"Mind of e'en Thought, and, lo, God's unexpressed
"Will draws above us ! All then is to win
"Save that. How much for me, then ? where begin
"My work ? About me, faces ! and they flock,
"The earnest faces. What shall I unlock
"By song ? behold me prompt, whate'er it be,
"To minister : how much can mortals see

“Of Life? No more than so? I take the task
“And marshal you Life’s elemental masque,
“Show Men, on evil or on good lay stress,
“This light, this shade make prominent, suppress
“All ordinary hues that softening blend
“Such natures with the level. Apprehend
“Which sinner is, which saint, if I allot
“Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, a blaze or blot,
“To those you doubt concerning! I enwomb
“Some wretched Friedrich with his red-hot tomb;
“Some dubious spirit, Lombard Agilulph
“With the black chastening river I engulph!
“Some unapproached Matilda I enshrine
“With languors of the planet of decline—
“These, fail to recognize, to arbitrate
“Between henceforth, to rightly estimate
“Thus marshalled in the masque! Myself, the while,
“As one of you, am witness, shrink or smile
“At my own showing! Next age—what ’s to do?
“The men and women stationed hitherto
“Will I unstation, good and bad, conduct
“Each nature to its farthest, or obstruct
“At soonest, in the world: light, thwarted, breaks
“A limpid purity to rainbow flakes,
“Or shadow, massed, freezes to gloom: behold
“How such, with fit assistance to unfold,

- “ Or obstacles to crush them, disengage
“ Their forms, love, hate, hope, fear, peace make, war
wage,
“ In presence of you all ! Myself, implied
“ Superior now, as, by the platform’s side,
“ I bade them do and suffer,—would last content
“ The world . . . no—that ’s too far ! I circumvent
“ A few, my masque contented, and to these
“ Offer unveil the last of mysteries—
“ Man’s inmost life shall have yet freer play :
“ Once more I cast external things away,
“ And natures composite, so decompose
“ That ” . . . Why, he writes *Sordello* !
“ How I rose,
“ And how have you advanced ! since evermore
“ Yourselves effect what I was fain before
“ Effect, what I supplied yourselves suggest,
“ What I leave bare yourselves can now invest.
“ How we attain to talk as brothers talk,
“ In half-words, call things by half-names, no balk
“ From discontinuing old aids. To-day
“ Takes in account the work of Yesterday :
“ Has not the world a Past now, its adept
“ Consults ere he dispense with or accept
“ New aids ? a single touch more may enhance,
“ A touch less turn to insignificance

"Those structures' symmetry the past has strewed
 "The world with, once so bare. Leave the mere rude
 "Explicit details! 't is but brother's speech
 "We need, speech where an accent's change gives each
 "The other's soul—no speech to understand
 "By former audience: need was then to expand,
 "Expatriate—hardly were we brothers! true—
 "Nor I lament my small remove from you,
 "Nor reconstruct what stands already. Ends
 "Accomplished turn to means: my art intends
 "New structure from the ancient: as they changed
 "The spoils of every clime at Venice, ranged
 "The horned and snouted Libyan god, upright
 "As in his desert, by some simple bright
 "Clay cinerary pitcher—Thebes as Rome,
 "Athens as Byzant rifled, till their Dome
 "From earth's reputed consummations razed
 "A seal, the all-transmuting Triad blazed
 "Above. Ah, whose that fortune? Ne'ertheless
 "E'en he must stoop contented to express
 "No tithe of what 's to say—the vehicle
 "Never sufficient: but his work is still
 "For faces like the faces that select
 "The single service I am bound effect,—
 "That bid me cast aside such fancies, bow
 "Taurello to the Guelf cause, disallow

“The Kaiser’s coming—which with heart, soul, strength,
“I labour for, this eve, who feel at length
“My past career’s outrageous vanity,
“And would, as its amends, die, even die
“Now I first estimate the boon of life,
“If death might win compliance—sure, this strife
“Is right for once—the People my support.”

My poor Sordello ! what may we extort
By this, I wonder? Palma’s lighted eyes
Turned to Taurello who, long past surprise,
Began, “You love him—what you’d say at large
“Let me say briefly. First, your father’s charge
“To me, his friend, peruse : I guessed indeed
“You were no stranger to the course decreed.
“He bids me leave his children to the saints :
“As for a certain project, he acquaints
“The Pope with that, and offers him the best
“Of your possessions to permit the rest
“Go peaceably—to Ecelin, a stripe
“Of soil the cursed Vicentines will gripe,
“—To Alberic, a patch the Trevisan
“Clutches already ; extricate, who can,
“Treville, Villarazzi, Puissolo,
“Loria and Cartiglione !—all must go,
“And with them go my hopes. ’T is lost, then ! Lost
“This eve, our crisis, and some pains it cost

"Procuring ; thirty years—as good I'd spent
 "Like our admonisher ! But each his bent
 "Pursues : no question, one might live absurd
 "Oneself this while, by deed as he by word
 "Persisting to obtrude an influence where
 "'T is made account of, much as . . . nay, you fare
 "With twice the fortune, youngster !—I submit,
 "Happy to parallel my waste of wit
 "With the renowned Sordello's : you decide
 "A course for me. Romano may abide
 "Romano,—Bacchus ! After all, what dearth
 "Of Ecelins and Alberics on earth?
 "Say there 's a prize in prospect, must disgrace
 "Betide competitors, unless they style
 "Themselves Romano? Were it worth my while
 "To try my own luck ! But an obscure place
 "Suits me—there wants a youth to bustle, stalk
 "And attitudinize—some fight, more talk,
 "Most flaunting badges—how, I might make clear
 "Since Friedrich's very purposes lie here
 "—Here, pity they are like to lie ! For me,
 "With station fixed unceremoniously
 "Long since, small use contesting ; I am but
 "The liegeman—you are born the lieges : shut
 "That gentle mouth now ! or resume your kin
 "In your sweet self ; were Palma Ecelin

"For me to work with! Could that neck endure
"This bauble for a cumbrous garniture,
"She should . . . or might one bear it for her? Stay—
"I have not been so flattered many a day
"As by your pale friend—Bacchus! The least help
"Would lick the hind's fawn to a lion's whelp:
"His neck is broad enough—a ready tongue
"Beside: too writhled—but, the main thing, young—
"I could . . . why, look ye!"

And the badge was thrown
Across Sordello's neck: "This badge alone
"Makes you Romano's Head—becomes superb
"On your bare neck, which would, on mine, disturb
"The pauldron," said Taurello. A mad act,
Nor even dreamed about before—in fact,
Not when his sportive arm rose for the nonce—
But he had dallied overmuch, this once,
With power: the thing was done, and he, aware
The thing was done, proceeded to declare—
(So like a nature made to serve, excel
In serving, only feel by service well!)
—That he would make Sordello that and more.
"As good a scheme as any. What 's to pore
"At in my face?" he asked—"ponder instead
"This piece of news; you are Romano's Head!
"One cannot slacken pace so near the goal,

“Suffer my Azzo to escape heart-whole
“This time! For you there’s Palma to espouse—
“For me, one crowning trouble ere I house
“Like my compeer.”

On which ensued a strange
And solemn visitation; there came change
O’er every one of them; each looked on each:
Up in the midst a truth grew, without speech.
And when the giddiness sank and the haze
Subsided, they were sitting, no amaze,
Sordello with the baldric on, his sire
Silent, though his proportions seemed aspire
Momently; and, interpreting the thrill,—
Night at its ebb,—Palma was found there still
Relating somewhat Adelaide confessed
A year ago, while dying on her breast,—
Of a contrivance, that Vicenza night
When Ecelin had birth. “Their convoy’s flight,
“Cut off a moment, coiled inside the flame
“That wallowed like a dragon at his game
“The toppling city through—San Biagio rocks!
“And wounded lies in her delicious locks
“Retrude, the frail mother, on her face,
“None of her wasted, just in one embrace
“Covering her child: when, as they lifted her,
“Cleaving the tumult, mighty, mightier

“ And mightiest Taurello’s cry outbroke,
“ Leapt like a tongue of fire that cleaves the smoke,
“ Midmost to cheer his Mantuans onward—drown
“ His colleague Ecelin’s clamour, up and down
“ The disarray : failed Adelaide see then
“ Who was the natural chief, the man of men?
“ Outstripping time, her infant there burst swathe,
“ Stood up with eyes haggard beyond the scathe
“ From wandering after his heritage
“ Lost once and lost for aye : and why that rage,
“ That deprecating glance? A new shape leant
“ On a familiar shape—gloatingly bent
“ O’er his discomfiture ; ’mid wreaths it wore,
“ Still one outflamed the rest—her child’s before
“ ’T was Salinguerra’s for his child : scorn, hate,
“ Rage now might startle her when all too late !
“ Then was the moment !—rival’s foot had spurned
“ Never that House to earth else ! Sense returned—
“ The act conceived, adventured and complete,
“ They bore away to an obscure retreat
“ Mother and child—Retrude’s self not slain”
(Nor even here Taurello moved) “ though pain
“ Was fled ; and what assured them most ’t was fled,
“ All pain, was, if they raised the pale hushed head
“ ’T would turn this way and that, waver awhile,
“ And only settle into its old smile—

“(Graceful as the disquieted water-flag
 “Steadying itself, remarked they, in the quag
 “On either side their path)—when suffered look
 “Down on her child. They marched : no sign once
 shook
 “The company’s close litter of crossed spears
 “Till, as they reached Goito, a few tears
 “Slipped in the sunset from her long black lash,
 “And she was gone. So far the action rash;
 “No crime. They laid Retrude in the font,
 “Taurello’s very gift, her child was wont
 “To sit beneath—constant as eve he came
 “To sit by its attendant girls the same
 “As one of them. For Palma, she would blend
 “With this magnific spirit to the end,
 “That ruled her first ; but scarcely had she dared
 “To disobey the Adelaide who scared
 “Her into vowing never to disclose
 “A secret to her husband, which so froze
 “His blood at half-recital, she contrived
 “To hide from him Taurello’s infant lived,
 “Lest, by revealing that, himself should mar
 “Romano’s fortunes. And, a crime so far,
 “Palma received that action : she was told
 “Of Salinguerra’s nature, of his cold
 “Calm acquiescence in his lot ! But free

“To impart the secret to Romano, she
“Engaged to repossess Sordello of
“His heritage, and hers, and that way doff
“The mask, but after years, long years : while now,
“Was not Romano’s sign-mark on that brow?”

Across Taurello’s heart his arms were locked :
And when he did speak ’t was as if he mocked
The minstrel, “who had not to move,” he said,
“Nor stir—should fate defraud him of a shred
“Of his son’s infancy? much less his youth!”
(Laughingly all this)—“which to aid, in truth,
“Himself, reserved on purpose, had not grown
“Old, not too old—’t was best they kept alone
“Till now, and never idly met till now ;”
—Then, in the same breath, told Sordello how
All intimations of this eve’s event
Were lies, for Friedrich must advance to Trent,
Thence to Verona, then to Rome, there stop,
Tumble the Church down, institute a-top
The Alps a Prefecture of Lombardy :
—“That ’s now !—no prophesying what may be
“Anon, with a new monarch of the clime,
“Native of Gesi, passing his youth’s prime
“At Naples. Tito bids my choice decide
“On whom . . .”

“Embrace him, madman !” Palma cried,

Who through the laugh saw sweat-drops burst apace,
And his lips blanching : he did not embrace
Sordello, but he laid Sordello's hand
On his own eyes, mouth, forehead.

Understand,

This while Sordello was becoming flushed
Out of his whiteness ; thoughts rushed, fancies rushed ;
He pressed his hand upon his head and signed
Both should forbear him. “ Nay, the best 's behind ! ”
Taurello laughed—not quite with the same laugh :
“ The truth is, thus we scatter, ay, like chaff
“ These Guelfs, a despicable monk recoils
“ From : nor expect a fickle Kaiser spoils
“ Our triumph !—Friedrich ? Think you, I intend
“ Friedrich shall reap the fruits of blood I spend
“ And brain I waste ? Think you, the people clap
“ Their hands at my out-hewing this wild gap
“ For any Friedrich to fill up ? 'T is mine—
“ That 's yours : I tell you, towards some such design
“ Have I worked blindly, yes, and idly, yes,
“ And for another, yes—but worked no less
“ With instinct at my heart ; I else had swerved,
“ While now—look round ! My cunning has preserved
“ Samminiato—that 's a central place
“ Secures us Florence, boy,—in Pisa's case.
“ By land as she by sea ; with Pisa ours,

“ And Florence, and Pistoia, one devours
“ The land at leisure ! Gloriously dispersed —
“ Brescia, observe, Milan, Piacenza first
“ That flanked us (ah, you know not !) in the March ;
“ On these we pile, as keystone of our arch,
“ Romagna and Bologna, whose first span
“ Covered the Trentine and the Valsugan ;
“ Sofia’s Egna by Bolgiano ’s sure ! ” . . .
So he proceeded : half of all this, pure
Delusion, doubtless, nor the rest too true,
But what was undone he felt sure to do,
As ring by ring he wrung off, flung away
The pauldron-rings to give his sword-arm play—
Need of the sword now ! That would soon adjust
Aught wrong at present ; to the sword intrust
Sordello’s whiteness, undersize : ’t was plain
He hardly rendered right to his own brain—
Like a brave hound, men educate to pride
Himself on speed or scent nor aught beside,
As though he could not, gift by gift, match men !
Palma had listened patiently : but when
’T was time expostulate, attempt withdraw
Taurello from his child, she, without awe
Took off his iron arms from, one by one,
Sordello’s shrinking shoulders, and, that done,
Made him avert his visage and relieve

Sordello (you might see his corslet heave
The while) who, loose, rose—tried to speak, then sank:
They left him in the chamber. All was blank.
And even reeling down the narrow stair
Taurello kept up, as though unaware
Palma was by to guide him, the old device
—Something of Milan—“how we muster thrice
“The Torriani’s strength there; all along
“Our own Visconti cowed them”—thus the song
Continued even while she bade him stoop,
Thrid somehow, by some glimpse of arrow-loop,
The turnings to the gallery below,
Where he stopped short as Palma let him go.
When he had sat in silence long enough
Splintering the stone bench, braving a rebuff
She stopped the truncheon; only to commence
One of Sordello’s poems, a pretence
For speaking, some poor rhyme of “Elys’ hair
“And head that’s sharp and perfect like a pear,
“So smooth and close are laid the few fine locks
“Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
“Sun-blanch’d the livelong summer”—from his worst
Performance, the Goito, as his first:
And that at end, conceiving from the brow
And open mouth no silence would serve now,
Went on to say the whole world loved that man

And, for that matter, thought his face, tho' wan,
Eclipsed the Count's—he sucking in each phrase
As if an angel spoke. The foolish praise
Ended, he drew her on his mailed knees, made
Her face a framework with his hands, a shade,
A crown, an aureole : there must she remain
(Her little mouth compressed with stifling pain
As in his gloves she felt her tresses twitch)
To get the best look at, in fittest niche
Dispose his saint. That done, he kissed her brow,
—“Lauded her father for his treason now,”
He told her, “only, how could one suspect
“The wit in him?—whose clansman, recollect,
‘Was ever Salinguerra—she, the same,
“Romano and his lady—so, might claim
“To know all, as she should”—and thus begun
Schemes with a vengeance, schemes on schemes,
“not one
“Fit to be told that foolish boy,” he said,
“But only let Sordello Palma wed,
“—Then !”

‘T was a dim long narrow place at best :
Midway a sole grate showed the fiery West,
As shows its corpse the world's end some split tomb—
A gloom, a rift of fire, another gloom,
Faced Palma—but at length Taurello set

Her free ; the grating held one ragged jet
Of fierce gold fire : he lifted her within
The hollow underneath—how else begin
Fate's second marvellous cycle, else renew
The ages than with Palma plain in view ?
Then paced the passage, hands clenched, head erect,
Pursuing his discourse ; a grand unchecked
Monotony made out from his quick talk
And the recurring noises of his walk ;
—Somewhat too much like the o'ercharged assent
Of two resolved friends in one danger blent,
Who hearten each the other against heart ;
Boasting there 's nought to care for, when, apart
The boaster, all 's to care for. He, beside
Some shape not visible, in power and pride
Approached, out of the dark, ginglyly near,
Nearer, passed close in the broad light, his ear
Crimson, eyeballs suffused, temples full-fraught,
Just a snatch of the rapid speech you caught,
And on he strode into the opposite dark,
Till presently the harsh heel's turn, a spark
I' the stone, and whirl of some loose embossed throng
That crashed against the angle aye so long
After the last, punctual to an amount
Of mailed great paces you could not but count,—
Prepared you for the pacing back again.

And by the snatches you might ascertain
That, Friedrich's Prefecture surmounted, left
By this alone in Italy, they cleft
Asunder, crushed together, at command
Of none, were free to break up Hildebrand,
Rebuild, he and Sordello, Charlemagne—
But garnished, Strength with Knowledge, "if we deign
"Accept that compromise and stoop to give
"Rome law, the Cæsar's Representative."
Enough, that the illimitable flood
Of triumphs after triumphs, understood
In its faint reflux (you shall hear) sufficed
Young Ecelin for appanage, enticed
Him on till, these long quiet in their graves,
He found 't was looked for that a whole life's braves
Should somehow be made good; so, weak and worn,
Must stagger up at Milan, one grey morn
Of the to-come, and fight his latest fight.
But, Salinguerra's prophecy at height—
He voluble with a raised arm and stiff,
A blaring voice, a blazing eye, as if
He had our very Italy to keep
Or cast away, or gather in a heap
To garrison the better—ay, his word
Was, "run the cucumber into a gourd,
"Drive Trent upon Apulia"—at their pitch

Who spied the continents and islands which
 Grew mulberry leaves and sickles, in the map—
 (Strange that three such confessions so should hap
 To Palma, Dante spoke with in the clear
 Amorous silence of the Swooning-sphere,—
Cunizza, as he called her! Never ask
 Of Palma more! She sat, knowing her task
 Was done, the labour of it,—for, success
 Concerned not Palma, passion's votaress.)
 Triumph at neight, and thus Sordello crowned—
 Above the passage suddenly a sound
 Stops speech, stops walk: back shrinks Taurello, bids
 With large involuntary asking lids,
 Palma interpret. "T is his own foot-stamp—
 "Your hand! His summons! Nay, this idle damp
 "Befits not!" Out they two reeled dizzily.
 "Visconti's strong at Milan," resumed he,
 In the old, somewhat insignificant way—
 (Was Palma wont, years afterward, to say)
 As though the spirit's flight, sustained thus far,
 Dropped at that very instant.

Gone they are—

*Palma, Taurello; Eglamor anon,
 Ecelin,—only Naddo's never gone!
 —Labours, this moonrise, what the Master meant:
 "Is Squarcialupo speckled?—purulent,

“ I ’d say, but when was Providence put out?
“ He carries somehow handily about
“ His spite nor fouls himself ! ” Goito’s vines
Stand like a cheat detected—stark rough lines,
The moon breaks through, a grey mean scale against
The vault where, this eve’s Maiden, thou remain’st
Like some fresh martyr, eyes fixed—who can tell?
As Heaven, now all ’s at end, did not so well,
Spite of the faith and victory, to leave
Its virgin quite to death in the lone eve.
While the persisting hermit-bee . . . ha ! wait
No longer : these in compass, forward fate !

BOOK THE SIXTH.

THE thought of Eglamor's least like a thought,
 And yet a false one, was, "Man shrinks to nought
 "If matched with symbols of immensity;
 "Must quail, forsooth, before a quiet sky
 "Or sea, too little for their quietude:"
 And, truly, somewhat in Sordello's mood
 Confirmed its speciousness, while eve slow sank
 Down the near terrace to the farther bank,
 And only one spot left from out the night
 Glimmered upon the river opposite—
 A breadth of watery heaven like a bay,
 A sky-like space of water, ray for ray,
 And star for star, one richness where they mixed
 As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
 Tumultuary splendours folded in
 To die. Nor turned he till Ferrara's din
 (Say, the monotonous speech from a man's lip
 Who lets some first and eager purpose slip

In a new fancy's birth—the speech keeps on
Though elsewhere its informing soul be gone)
—Aroused him, surely offered succour. Fate
Paused with this eve ; ere she precipitate
Herself,—best put off new strange thoughts awhile,
That voice, those large hands, that portentous smile,—
What help to pierce the future as the past
Lay in the plaining city?

And at last

The main discovery and prime concern,
All that just now imported him to learn,
Truth's self, like yonder slow moon to complete
Heaven, rose again, and, naked at his feet,
Lighted his old life's every shift and change,
Effort with counter-effort ; nor the range
Of each looked wrong except wherein it checked,
Some other—which of these could he suspect,
Prying into them by the sudden blaze?
The real way seemed made up of all the ways—
Mood after mood of the one mind in him ;
Tokens of the existence, bright or dim,
Of a transcendent all-embracing sense
Demanding only outward influence,
A soul, in Palma's phrase, above his soul,
Power to uplift his power,—such moon's control
Over such sea-depths,—and their mass had swept

Onward from the beginning and still kept
Its course : but years and years the sky above
Held none, and so, untasked of any love,
His sensitiveness idled, now amort,
Alive now, and, to sullenness or sport
Given wholly up, disposed itself anew
At every passing instigation, grew
And dwindled at caprice, in foam-showers spilt,
Wedge-like insisting, quivered now a gilt
Shield in the sunshine, now a blinding race
Of whitest ripples o'er the reef—found place
For much display ; not gathered up and, hurled
Right from its heart, encompassing the world.
So had Sordello been, by consequence,
Without a function : others made pretence
To strength not half his own, yet had some core
Within, submitted to some moon, before
Them still, superior still whate'er their force,—
Were able therefore to fulfil a course,
Nor missed life's crown, authentic attribute.
To each who lives must be a certain fruit
Of having lived in his degree,—a stage,
Earlier or later in men's pilgrimage,
To stop at ; and to this the spirits tend
Who, still discovering beauty without end,
Amass the scintillations, make one star

—Something unlike them, self-sustained, afar,—
And meanwhile nurse the dream of being blest
By winning it to notice and invest
Their souls with alien glory, some one day
Whene'er the nucleus, gathering shape alway,
Round to the perfect circle—soon or late,
According as themselves are formed to wait ;
Whether mere human beauty will suffice
—The yellow hair and the luxurious eyes,
Or human intellect seem best, or each
Combine in some ideal form past reach
On earth, or else some shade of these, some aim,
Some love, hate even, take their place, the same,
So to be served—all this they do not lose,
Waiting for death to live, nor idly choose
What must be Hell—a progress thus pursued
Through all existence, still above the food
That 's offered them, still fain to reach beyond
The widened range, in virtue of their bond
Of sovereignty. Not that a Palma's Love,
A Salinguerra's Hate, would equal prove
To swaying all Sordello : but why doubt
Some love meet for such strength, some moon without
Would match his sea?—or fear, Good manifest,
Only the Best breaks faith?—Ah but the Best
Somehow eludes us ever, still might be

And is not ! Crave we gems ? No penury
 Of their material round us ! Pliant earth
 And plastic flame—what balks the mage his birth
 —Jacinth in balls or lodestone by the block ?
 Flinders enrich the strand, veins swell the rock ;
 Nought more ! Seek creatures ? Life 's i' the tempest,
 thought

Clothes the keen hill-top, mid-day woods are fraught
 With fervours : human forms are well enough !
 But we had hoped, encouraged by the stuff
 Profuse at nature's pleasure, men beyond
 These actual men !—and thus are over-fond
 In arguing, from Good—the Best, from force
 Divided—force combined, an ocean's course
 From this our sea whose mere intestine pants
 Might seem at times sufficient to our wants.

External power ! If none be adequate,
 And he stand forth ordained (a prouder fate)
 Himself a law to his own sphere ? “ Remove
 “ All incompleteness ! ” for that law, that love ?
 Nay, if all other laws be feints,—truth veiled
 Helpfully to weak vision that had failed
 To grasp aught but its special want,—for lure,
 Embodied ? Stronger vision could endure
 The unbodied want : no part—the whole of truth !
 The People were himself ; nor, by the ruth

At their condition, was he less impelled
To alter the discrepancy beheld,
Than if, from the sound whole, a sickly part
Subtracted were transformed, decked out with art,
Then palmed on him as alien woe—the Guelf
To succour, proud that he forsook himself.
All is himself ; all service, therefore, rates
Alike, nor serving one part, immolates
The rest : but all in time ! “That lance of yours
“Makes havoc soon with Malek and his Moors,
“That buckler’s lined with many a giant’s beard
“Ere long, our champion, be the lance upreared,
“The buckler wielded handsomely as now !
“But view your escort, bear in mind your vow,
“Count the pale tracts of sand to pass ere that,
“And, if you hope we struggle through the flat,
“Put lance and buckler by ! Next half-month lacks
“Mere sturdy exercise of mace and axe
“To cleave this dismal brake of prickly-pear
“Which bristling holds Cydippe by the hair, ,
“Lames barefoot Agathon : this felled, we’ll try
“The picturesque achievements by and by—
“Next life !”

Ay, rally, mock, O People, urge
Your claims !—for thus he ventured, to the verge,
Push a vain mummery which perchance distrust

Of his fast-slipping resolution thrust
Likewise : accordingly the Crowd—(as yet
He had unconsciously contrived forget
I' the whole, to dwell o' the points . . . one might assuage
The signal horrors easier than engage
With a dim vulgar vast unobvious grief
Not to be fancied off, nor gained relief
In brilliant fits, cured by a happy quirk,
But by dim vulgar vast unobvious work
To correspond . . .) this Crowd then, forth they stood.
“And now content thy stronger vision, brood
“On thy bare want ; uncovered, turf by turf,
“Study the corpse-face thro' the taint-worms' scurf !”

Down sank the People's Then ; uprose their Now.
These sad ones render service to ! And how
Piteously little must that service prove
—Had surely proved in any case ! for, move
Each other obstacle away, let youth
Become aware it had surprised a truth
'T were service to impart—can truth be seized,
Settled forthwith, and, of the captive eased,
Its captor find fresh prey, since this alit
So happily, no gesture luring it,
The earnest of a flock to follow ? Vain,
Most vain ! a life to spend ere this he chain
To the poor crowd's complacency : ere the crowd

Pronounce it captured, he descries a cloud
Its kin of twice the plume ; which he, in turr,
If he shall live as many lives, may learn
How to secure : not else. Then Mantua called
Back to his mind how certain bards were thrall'd
—Buds blasted, but of breath more like perfume
Than Naddo's staring nosegay's carrion bloom ;
Some insane rose that burnt heart out in sweets,
A spendthrift in the spring, no summer greets ;
Some Dularete, drunk with truths and wine,
Grown bestial, dreaming how become divine.
Yet to surmount this obstacle, commence
With the commencement, merits crowning ! Hence
Must truth be casual truth, elicited
In sparks so mean, at intervals dispread
So rarely, that 't is like at no one time
Of the world's story has not truth, the prime
Of truth, the very truth which, loosed, had hurled
The world's course right, been really in the world
—Content the while with some mean spark by dint
Of some chance-blow, the solitary hint
Of buried fire, which, rip earth's breast, would stream
Sky-ward !

Sordello's miserable gleam
Was looked for at the moment : he would dash
This badge. and all it brought, to earth,—abash

Taurello thus, perhaps persuade him wrest
The Kaiser from his purpose,—would attest
His own belief, in any case. Before
He dashes it however, think once more !
For, were that little, truly service? “Ay,
“I’ the end, no doubt ; but meantime? Plain you spy
“Its ultimate effect, but many flaws
“Of vision blur each intervening cause.
“Were the day’s fraction clear as the life’s sum
“Of service, Now as filled as teems To-come
“With evidence of good—nor too minute
“A share to vie with evil! No dispute,
“’T were fittest maintain the Guelfs in rule :
“That makes your life’s work : but you have to school
“Your day’s work on these natures circumstanced
“Thus variously, which yet, as each advanced
“Or might impede the Guelf rule, must be moved
“Now, for the Then’s sake,—hating what you loved,
“Loving old hatreds! Nor if one man bore
“Brand upon temples while his fellow wore
“The aureole, would it task you to decide :
“But, portioned duly out, the future vied
“Never with the unparcelled present! Smite
“Or spare so much on warrant all so slight?
“The present’s complete sympathies to break,
“Aversions bear with, for a future’s sake

“So feeble? Tito ruined through one speck,
“The Legate saved by his sole lightish fleck?
“This were work, true, but work performed at cost
“Of other work ; aught gained here, elsewhere lost.
“For a new segment spoil an orb half-done?
“Rise with the People one step, and sink—one?
“Were it but one step, less than the whole face
“Of things, your novel duty bids erase !
“Harms to abolish ! What, the prophet saith,
“The minstrel singeth vainly then? Old faith,
“Old courage, only born because of harms,
“Were not, from highest to the lowest, charms?
“Flame may persist ; but is not glare as staunch?
“Where the salt marshes stagnate, crystals branch ;
“Blood dries to crimson ; Evil ’s beautified
“In every shape. Thrust Beauty then aside
“And banish Evil ! Wherefore? After all,
“Is Evil a result less natural
“Than Good? For overlook the seasons’ strife
“With tree and flower,—the hideous animal life,
“(Of which who seeks shall find a grinning taunt
“For his solution, and endure the vaunt
“Of nature’s angel, as a child that knows
“Himself befooled, unable to propose
“Aught better than the fooling)—and but care
“For men, for the mere People then and there,—

"In these, could you but see that Good and Ill
 "Claimed you alike! Whence rose their claim but still
 "From Ill, as fruit of Ill? What else could knit
 "You theirs but Sorrow? Any free from it
 "Were also free from you! Whose happiness
 "Could be distinguished in this morning's press
 "Of miseries?—the fool's who passed a gibe
 "'On thee,' jeered he, 'so wedded to thy tribe,
 "'Thou carriest green and yellow tokens in
 "'Thy very face that thou art Ghibellin!'
 "Much hold on you that fool obtained! Nay mount
 "Yet higher—and upon men's own account
 "Must Evil stay: for, what is joy?—to heave
 "Up one obstruction more, and common leave
 "What was peculiar, by such act destroy
 "Itself; a partial death is every joy;
 "The sensible escape, enfranchisement
 "Of a sphere's essence: once the vexed—content,
 "The cramped—at large, the growing circle—round,
 "All 's to begin again—some novel bound
 "To break, some new enlargement to entreat;
 "The sphere though larger is not more complete.
 "Now for Mankind's experience: who alone
 "Might style the unobstructed world his own?
 "Whom palled Goito with its perfect things?
 "Sordello's self: whereas for Mankind springs

“Salvation by each hindrance interposed.
“They climb ; life’s view is not at once disclosed
“To creatures caught up, on the summit left,
“Heaven plain above them, yet of wings bereft :
“But lower laid, as at the mountain’s foot.
“So, range on range, the girdling forests shoot
“’Twixt your plain prospect and the throngs who scale
“Height after height, and pierce mists, veil by veil,
“Heartened with each discovery , in their soul,
“The Whole they seek by Parts—but, found that Whole,
“Could they revert, enjoy past gains? The space
“Of time you judge so meagre to embrace
“The Parts were more than plenty, once attained
“The Whole, to quite exhaust it : nought were gained
“But leave to look—not leave to do : Beneath
“Soon sates the looker—look Above, and Death
“Tempts ere a tithe of Life be tasted. Live
“First, and die soon enough, Sordello ! Give
“Body and spirit the first right they claim,
“And pasture soul on a voluptuous shame
“That you, a pageant-city’s denizen,
“Are neither vilely lodged midst Lombard men—
“Can force joy out of sorrow, seem to truck
“Bright attributes away for sordid muck,
“Yet manage from that very muck educe
“Gold ; then subject. nor scruple, to your cruce

"The world's discardings! Though real ingots pay
 "Your pains, the clods that yielded them are clay
 "To all beside,—would clay remain, though quenched
 "Your purging-fire; who 's robbed then? Had you
 wrenched

"An ampler treasure forth!—As 't is, they crave
 "A share that ruins you and will not save
 "Them. Why should sympathy command you quit
 "The course that makes your joy, nor will remit
 "Their woe? Would all arrive at joy? Reverse
 "The order (time instructs you) nor coerce
 "Each unit till, some predetermined mode,
 "The total be emancipate; men's road
 "Is one, men's times of travel many, thwart
 "No enterprising soul's precocious start
 "Before the general march! If slow or fast
 "All straggle up to the same point at last,
 "Why grudge your having gained, a month ago,
 "The brakes at balm-shed, asphodels in blow,
 "While they were landlocked? Speed their Then, but
 how

"This badge would suffer you improve your Now!"

"His time of action for, against, or with
 Our world (I labour to extract the pith
 Of this his problem) grew, that even-tide,
 Gigantic with its power of joy, beside

The world's eternity of impotence
To profit though at his whole joy's expense.
"Make nothing of my day because so brief?
"Rather make more : instead of joy, use grief
"Before its novelty have time subside !
"Wait not for the late savour, leave untried
"Virtue, the creaming honey-wine, quick squeeze
"Vice like a biting spirit from the lees
"Of life ! Together let wrath, hatred, lust,
"All tyrannies in every shape, be thrust
"Upon this Now, which time may reason out
"As mischiefs, far from benefits, no doubt ;
"But long ere then Sordello will have slept
"Away ; you teach him at Goito's crypt,
"There 's a blank issue to that fiery thrill.
"Stirring, the few cope with the many, still :
"So much of sand as, quiet, makes a mass
"Unable to produce three tufts of grass,
"Shall, troubled by the whirlwind, render void
"The whole calm glebe's endeavour : be employed !
"And e'en though somewhat smart the Crowd for this,
"Contribute each his pang to make your bliss,
"T is but one pang—one blood-drop to the bowl
"Which brimful tempts the sluggish asp uncowl
"At last, stains ruddily the dull red cape,
"And, kindling orbs grey as the unripe grape

“Before, avails forthwith to disentrance
“The potent, soon to lead a mystic dance
“Among you! For, who sits alone in Rome?
“Have those great hands indeed hewn out a home,
“And set me there to live? Oh life, life-breath,
“Life-blood,—ere sleep, come travail, life ere death!
“This life stream on my soul, direct, oblique,
“But always streaming! Hindrances? They pique:
“Helps? such . . . but why repeat, my soul o’ertops
“Each height, then every depth profoundlier drops?
“Enough that I can live, and would live! Wait
“For some transcendent life reserved by Fate
“To follow this? Oh, never! Fate, I trust
“The same, my soul to; for, as who flings dust,
“Perchance (so facile was the deed) she chequed
“The void with these materials to affect
“My soul diversely: these consigned anew
“To nought by death, what marvel if she threw
“A second and superber spectacle
“Before me? What may serve for sun, what still
“Wander a moon above me? What else wind
“About me like the pleasures left behind,
“And how shall some new flesh that is not flesh
“Cling to me? What’s new laughter? Soothes the fresh
“Sleep like sleep? Fate’s exhaustless for my sake
“In brave resource: but whether bids she slake

" My thirst at this first rivulet, or count
" No draught worth lip save from some rocky fount
" Above i' the clouds, while here she 's provident
" Of pure loquacious pearl, the soft tree-tent
" Guards, with its face of reate and sedge, nor fail
" The silver globules and gold-sparkling grail
" At bottom? Oh, 't were too absurd to slight
" For the hereafter the to-day's delight !
" Quench thirst at this, then seek next well-spring : wear
" Home-lilies ere strange lotus in my hair !
" Here is the Crowd, whom I with freest heart
" Offer to serve, contented for my part
" To give life up in service,—only grant
" That I do serve ; if otherwise, why want
" Aught further of me? If men cannot choose
" But set aside life, why should I refuse
" The gift? I take it—I, for one, engage
" Never to falter through my pilgrimage —
" Nor end it howling that the stock or stone
" Were enviable, truly : I, for one,
" Will praise the world, you style mere anteroom
" To palace—be it so ! shall I assume
" —My foot the courtly gait, my tongue the trope,
" My mouth the smirk, before the doors fly open
" One moment? What? with guarders row on row,
" Gay swarms of varlety that come and go,

" Pages to dice with, waiting-girls unlace
 " The plackets of, pert claimants help displace,
 " Heart-heavy suitors get a rank for,—laugh
 " At yon sleek parasite, break his own staff
 " 'Cross Beetle-brows the Usher's shoulder,—why
 " Admitted to the presence by and by,
 " Should thought of having lost these make me grieve
 " Among new joys I reach, for joys I leave?
 " Cool citrine-crystals, fierce pyropus-stone,
 " Are floor-work there! But do I let alone
 " That black-eyed peasant in the vestibule
 " Once and for ever?—Floor-work? No such fool!
 " Rather, were heaven to forestall earth, I 'd say
 " I, is it, must be blest? Then, my own way
 " Bless me! Giver firmer arm and fleeter foot,
 " I 'll thank you: but to no mad wings transmute
 " These limbs of mine—our greensward was so soft!
 " Nor camp I on the thunder-cloud aloft:
 " We feel the bliss distinctlier, having thus
 " Engines subservient, not mixed up with us.
 " Better move palpably through heaven: nor, freed
 " Of flesh, forsooth, from space to space proceed
 " Mid flying synods of worlds! No: in heaven's marge
 " Show Titan still, recumbent o'er his targe
 " Solid with stars—the Centaur at his game,
 " Made tremulously out in hoary flame!

“ Life! Yet the very cup whose extreme dull
“ Dregs, even, I would quaff, was dashed, at fall,
“ Aside so oft; the death I fly, revealed
“ So oft a better life this life concealed,
“ And which sage, champion, martyr, through each path
“ Have hunted fearlessly—the horrid bath,
“ The crippling-irons and the fiery chair.
“ ’T was well for them; let me become aware
“ As they, and I relinquish life, too! Let
“ What masters life disclose itself! Forget
“ Vain ordinances, I have one appeal—
“ I feel, am what I feel, know what I feel;
“ So much is truth to me. What Is, then? Since
“ One object, viewed diversely, may evince
“ Beauty and ugliness—this way attract,
“ That way repel,—why gloze upon the fact?
“ Why must a single of the sides be right?
“ What bids choose this and leave the opposite?
“ Where ’s abstract Right for me?—in youth endured
“ With Right still present, still to be pursued,
“ Thro’ all the interchange of circles, rife
“ Each with its proper law and mode of life,
“ Each to be dwelt at ease in: where, to sway
“ Absolute with the Kaiser, or obey
“ Implicit with his serf of fluttering heart,
“ Or, like a sudden thought of God’s, to start

“Up, Brutus in the presence, then go shout
“That some should pick the unstrung jewels out—
“Each, well!”

And, as in moments when the past
Gave partially enfranchisement, he cast
Himself quite through mere secondary states
Of his soul's essence, little loves and hates,
Into the mid deep yearnings overlaid
By these ; as who should pierce hill, plain, grove, glade,
And on into the very nucleus probe
That first determined there exist a globe.
As that were easiest, half the globe dissolved,
So seemed Sordello's closing-truth evolved
By his flesh-half's break-up ; the sudden swell
Of his expanding soul showed Ill and Well,
Sorrow and Joy, Beauty and Ugliness,
Virtue and Vice, the Larger and the Less,
All qualities, in fine, recorded here,
Might be but modes of Time and this one sphere,
Urgent on these, but not of force to bind
Eternity, as Time—as Matter—Mind,
If Mind, Eternity, should choose assert
Their attributes within a Life : thus girt
With circumstance, next change beholds them cinct
Quite otherwise—with Good and Ill distinct,
Joys, sorrows, tending to a like result—

Contrived to render easy, difficult,
This or the other course of . . . what new bond
In place of flesh may stop their flight beyond
Its new sphere, as that course does harm or good
To its arrangements. Once this understood,
As suddenly he felt himself alone,
Quite out of Time and this world : all was known.
What made the secret of his past despair?
—Most imminent when he seemed most aware
Of his own self-sufficiency : made mad
By craving to expand the power he had,
And not new power to be expanded?—just
This made it ; Soul on Matter being thrust,
Joy comes when so much Soul is wrecked in Time
On Matter : let the Soul's attempt sublime
Matter beyond the scheme and so prevent
By more or less that deed's accomplishment,
And Sorrow follows : Sorrow how avoid?
Let the employer match the thing employed,
Fit to the finite his infinity,
And thus proceed for ever, in degree
Changed but in kind the same, still limited
To the appointed circumstance and dead
To all beyond. A sphere is but a sphere ;
Small, Great, are merely terms we bandy here ;
Since to the spirit's absoluteness all

Are like. Now, of the present sphere we call
Life, are conditions ; take but this among
Many ; the body was to be so long
Youthful, no longer : but, since no control
Tied to that body's purposes his soul,
She chose to understand the body's trade
More than the body's self—had fain conveyed
Her boundless to the body's bounded lot.
Hence, the soul permanent, the body not,—
Scarcely its minute for enjoying here,—
The soul must needs instruct her weak compeer,
Run o'er its capabilities and wring
A joy thence, she held worth experiencing :
Which, far from half discovered even,—lo,
The minute gone, the body's power let go
Apportioned to that joy's acquirement ! Broke
Morning o'er earth, he yearned for all it woke—
From the volcano's vapour-flag, winds hoist
Black o'er the spread of sea,—down to the moist
Dale's silken barley-spikes sullied with rain,
Swayed earthwards, heavily to rise again—
The Small, a sphere as perfect as the Great
To the soul's absoluteness. Meditate
Too long on such a morning's cluster-chord
And the whole music it was framed afford,—
The chord's might half discovered, what should pluck

One string, his finger, was found palsy-struck
And then no marvel if the spirit, shown
A saddest sight—the body lost alone
Through her officious proffered help, deprived
Of this and that enjoyment Fate contrived,—
Virtue, Good, Beauty, each allowed slip hence,—
Vain-gloriously were fain, for recompense,
To stem the ruin even yet, protract
The body's term, supply the power it lacked
From her infinity, compel it learn
These qualities were only Time's concern,
And body may, with spirit helping, barred—
Advance the same, vanquished—obtain reward,
Reap joy where sorrow was intended grow,
Of Wrong make Right, and turn Ill Good below.
And the result is, the poor body soon
Sinks under what was meant a wondrous boon,
Leaving its bright accomplice all aghast.

So much was plain then, proper in the past ;
To be complete for, satisfy the whole
Series of spheres—Eternity, his soul
Needs must exceed, prove incomplete for, each
Single sphere—Time. But does our knowledge reach
No farther? Is the cloud of hindrance broke,
But by the failing of the fleshly yoke,
Its loves and hates, as now when death lets soar

Sordello, self-sufficient as before,
Though during the mere space that shall elapse
'Twixt his enthrallment in new bonds perhaps?
Must life be ever just escaped, which should
Have been enjoyed?—nay, might have been and would.
Each purpose ordered right—the soul's no whit
Beyond the body's purpose under it.
Like yonder breadth of watery heaven, a bay,
And that sky-space of water, ray for ray
And star for star, one richness where they mixed
As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
Tumultuary splendours folded in
To die—would soul, proportioned thus, begin
Exciting discontent, or surelier quell
The body if, aspiring, it rebel?
But how so order life? Still brutalize
The soul, the sad world's way, with muffled eyes
To all that was before, all that shall be
After this sphere—all and each quality
Save some sole and immutable Great, Good
And Beauteous whither fate has loosed its hood
To follow? Never may some soul see All
—The Great Before and After, and the Small
Now, yet be saved by this the simplest lore,
And take the single course prescribed before,
As the king-bird with ages on his plumes

Travels to die in his ancestral glooms?
But where descry the Love that shall select
That course? Here is a soul whom, to affect,
Nature has plied with all her means, from trees
And flowers e'en to the Multitude!—and these,
Decides he save or no? One word to end!

Ah my Sordello, I this once befriend
And speak for you. Of a Power above you still
Which, utterly incomprehensible,
Is out of rivalry, which thus you can
Love, tho' unloving all conceived by man—
What need! And of—none the minutest duct
To that out-nature, nought that would instruct
And so let rivalry begin to live—
But of a Power its representative
Who, being for authority the same,
Communication different, should claim
A course, the first chose but this last revealed—
This Human clear, as that Divine concealed—
What utter need!

What has Sordello found?
Or can his spirit go the mighty round,
End where poor Eglamor begun? So, says
Old fable, the two eagles went two ways
About the world: where, in the midst, they met,
Though on a shifting waste of sand, men set

Jove's temple. Quick, what has Sordello found?
For they approach—approach—that foot's rebound
Palma? No, Salinguerra though in mail;
They mount, have reached the threshold, dash the veil
Aside—and you divine who sat there dead,
Under his foot the badge: still, Palma said,
A triumph lingering in the wide eyes,
Wider than some spent swimmer's if he spies
Help from above in his extreme despair,
And, head far back on shoulder thrust, turns there
With short quick passionate cry: as Palma pressed
In one great kiss, her lips upon his breast,
It beat.

By this, the hermit-bee has stopped
His day's toil at Goito: the new-cropped
Dead vine-leaf answers, now 't is eve, he bit,
Twirled so, and filed all day: the mansion's fit,
God counselled for. As easy guess the word
That passed betwixt them, and become the third
To the soft small unfrighted bee, as tax
Him with one fault—so, no remembrance racks
Of the stone maidens and the font of stone
He, creeping through the crevice, leaves alone.
Alas, my friend, alas Sordello, whom
Anon they laid within that old font-tomb,
And, yet again, alas!

And now is 't worth
Our while bring back to mind, much less set forth
How Salinguerra extricates himself
Without Sordello? Ghibellin and Guef
May fight their fiercest out? If Richard sulked
In durance or the Marquis paid his mulct,
Who cares, Sordello gone? The upshot, sure,
Was peace ; our chief made some frank overture
That prospered ; compliment fell thick and fast
On its disposer, and Taurello passed
With foe and friend for an outstripping soul,
Nine days at least. Then,—fairly reached the goal,—
He, by one effort, blotted the great hope
Out of his mind, nor further tried to cope
With Este, that mad evening's style, but sent
Away the Legate and the League, content
No blame at least the brothers had incurred,
—Dispatched a message to the Monk, he heard
Patiently first to last, scarce shivered at,
Then curled his limbs up on his wolfskin mat
And ne'er spoke more,—informed the Ferrarese
He but retained their rule so long as these
Lingered in pupilage,—and last, no mode
Apparent else of keeping safe the road
From Germany direct to Lombardy
For Friedrich,—none, that is, to guarantee

The faith and promptitude of who should next
 Obtain Sofia's dowry,—sore perplexed—
 (Sofia being youngest of the tribe
 Of daughters, Ecelin was wont to bribe
 The envious magnates with—nor, since he sent
 Henry of Egna this fair child, had Trent
 Once failed the Kaiser's purposes—"we lost
 "Egna last year, and who takes Egna's post—
 "Opens the Lombard gate if Friedrich knock?")
 Himself espoused the Lady of the Rock
 In pure necessity, and, so destroyed
 His slender last of chances, quite made void
 Old prophecy, and spite of all the schemes
 Overt and covert, youth's deeds, age's dreams,
 Was sucked into Romano. And so hushed
 He up this evening's work that, when 't was brushed
 Somehow against by a blind chronicle
 Which, chronicling whatever woe befell
 Ferrara, noted this the obscure woe
 Of "Salinguerra's sole son Giacomo
 "Deceased, fatuous and doting, ere his sire,"
 The townsfolk rubbed their eyes, could but admire
 Which of Sofia's five was meant.

The chaps

Of earth's dead hope were tardy to collapse,
 Obliterated not the beautiful

Distinctive features at a crash : but dull
And duller these, next year, as Guelfs withdrew
Each to his stronghold. Then (securely too
Ecelin at Campese slept ; close by,
Who likes may see him in Solagna lie,
With cushioned head and gloved hand to denote
The cavalier he was)—then his heart smote
Young Ecelin at last ; long since adult.
And, save Vicenza's business, what result
In blood and blaze? (So hard to intercept
Sordello till his plain withdrawal!) Stepped
Then its new lord on Lombardy. I' the nick
Of time when Ecelin and Alberic
Closed with Taurello, come precisely news
That in Verona half the souls refuse
Allegiance to the Marquis and the Count—
Have cast them from a throne they bid him mount,
Their Podestà, thro' his ancestral worth.
Ecelin flew there, and the town henceforth
Was wholly his—Taurello sinking back
From temporary station to a track
That suited. News received of this acquit,
Friedrich did come to Lombardy : who missed
Taurello then? Another year : they took
Vicenza, left the Marquis scarce a nook
For refuge, and, when hundreds two or three

Of Guelfs conspired to call themselves "The Free,"
 Opposing Alberic,—vile Bassanese,—
 (Without Sordello !)—Ecelin at ease
 Slaughtered them so observably, that oft
 A little Salinguerra looked with soft
 Blue eyes up, asked his sire the proper age
 To get appointed his proud uncle's page.
 More years passed, and that sire had dwindled down
 To a mere showy turbulent soldier, grown
 Better through age, his parts still in repute,
 Subtle—how else?—but hardly so astute
 As his contemporaneous friends professed ;
 Undoubtedly a brawler : for the rest,
 Known by each neighbour, and allowed for, let
 Keep his incorrigible ways, nor fret
 Men who would miss their boyhood's bugbear : "trap
 "The ostrich, suffer our bald osprey flap
 "A battered pinion!"—was the word. In fine,
 One flap too much and Venice's marine
 Was meddled with ; no overlooking that !
 She captured him in his Ferrara, fat
 And florid at a banquet, more by fraud
 Than force, to speak the truth ; there 's slender laud
 Ascribed you for assisting eighty years
 To pull his death on such a man ; fate shears
 The life-cord prompt enough whose last fine threads

You fritter : so, presiding his board-head,
 The old smile, your assurance all went well
 With Friedrich (as if he were like to tell !)
 In rushed (a plan contrived before) our friends,
 Made some pretence at fighting, some amends
 For the shame done his eighty years—(apart
 The principle, none found it in his heart
 To be much angry with Taurello)—gained
 Their galleys with the prize, and what remained
 But carry him to Venice for a show?
 —Set him, as 't were, down gently—free to go
 His gait, inspect our square, pretend observe
 The swallows soaring their eternal curve
 'Twixt Theodore and Mark, if citizens
 Gathered importunately, fives and tens,
 To point their children the Magnifico,
 All but a monarch once in firm-land, go
 His gait among them now—"it took, indeed,
 "Fully this Ecelin to supersede
 "That man," remarked the seniors. Singular!
 Sordello's inability to bar
 Rivals the stage, that evening, mainly brought
 About by his strange disbelief that aught
 Was ever to be done,—this thrust the Twain
 Under Taurello's tutelage,—whom, brain
 And heart and hand, he forthwith in one rod

Indissolubly bound to baffle God
Who loves the world—and thus allowed the thin
Grey wizened dwarfish devil Ecelin,
And massy-muscled big-boned Alberic
(Mere man, alas !) to put his problem quick
To demonstration—prove wherever 's will
To do, there 's plenty to be done, or ill
Or good. Anointed, then, to rend and rip—
Kings of the gag and flesh-hook, screw and whip,
They plagued the world : a touch of Hildebrand
(So far from obsolete !) made Lombards band
Together, cross their coats as for Christ's cause,
And saving Milan win the world's applause.
Ecelin perished : and I think grass grew
Never so pleasant as in Valley Rù
By San Zenon where Alberic in turn
Saw his exasperated captors burn
Seven children and their mother ; then, regaled
So far, tied on to a wild horse, was trailed
To death through raunce and bramble-bush. I take
God's part and testify that 'mid the brake
Wild o'er his castle on the pleasant knoll,
You hear its one tower left, a belfry, toll—
The earthquake spared it last year, laying flat
The modern church beneath,—no harm in that !
Chirrup the contumacious grasshopper,

Rustles the lizard and the cushats chirre
Above the ravage : there, at deep of day
A week since, heard I the old Canon say
He saw with his own eyes a barrow burst
And Alberic's huge skeleton unheard
Only five years ago. He added, " June 's
" The month for carding off our first cocoons
" The silkworms fabricate "—a double news,
Nor he nor I could tell the worthier. Choose !

And Naddo gone, all 's gone ; not Eglamor !
Believe, I knew the face I waited for,
A guest my spirit of the golden courts !
Oh strange to see how, despite ill-reports,
Disuse, some wear of years, that face retained
Its joyous look of love ! Suns waxed and waned,
And still my spirit held an upward flight,
Spiral on spiral, gyres of life and light
More and more gorgeous—ever that face there
The last admitted ! crossed, too, with some care
As perfect triumph were not sure for all,
But, on a few, enduring damp must fall,
—A transient struggle, haply a painful sense
Of the inferior nature's clinging—whence
Slight starting tears easily wiped away,
Fine jealousies soon stifled in the play
Of irrepressible admiration—not

Aspiring, all considered, to their lot
Who ever, just as they prepare ascend
Spiral on spiral, wish thee well, impend
Thy frank delight at their exclusive track,
That upturned fervid face and hair put back !

Is there no more to say? He of the rhymes—
Many a tale, of this retreat betimes,
Was born : Sordello die at once for men?
The Chroniclers of Mantua tired their pen
Telling how *Sordello Prince Visconti* saved
Mantua, and elsewhere notably behaved—
Who thus, by fortune ordering events,
Passed with posterity, to all intents,
For just the god he never could become.
As Knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb
In praise of him : while what he should have been,
Could be, and was not—the one step too mean
For him to take,—we suffer at this day
Because of : Ecelin had pushed away
Its chance ere Dante could arrive and take
That step Sordello spurned, for the world's sake :
He did much—but Sordello's chance was gone.
Thus, had Sordello dared that step alone,
Apollo had been compassed : 't was a fit
He wished should go to him, not he to it

Singing or fighting elsewhere, while he dozed
Really at home—one who was chiefly glad
To have achieved the few real deeds he had,
Because that way assured they were not worth
Doing, so spared from doing them henceforth—
A tree that covets fruitage and yet tastes
Never itself, itself. Had he embraced
Their cause then, men had plucked Hesperian fruit
And, praising that, just thrown him in to boot
All he was anxious to appear, but scarce
Solicitous to be. A sorry farce
Such life is, after all! Cannot I say
He lived for some one better thing? this way.—
Lo, on a heathy brown and nameless hill
By sparkling Asolo, in mist and chill,
Morning just up, higher and higher runs
A child barefoot and rosy. See! the sun's
On the square castle's inner-court's low wall
Like the chine of some extinct animal
Half turned to earth and flowers; and through the
haze
(Save where some slender patches of grey maize
Are to be overleaped) that boy has crossed
The whole hill-side of dew and powder-frost
Matting the balm and mountain camomile.
Up and up goes he, singing all the while

Some unintelligible words to beat
 The lark, God's poet, swooning at his feet,
 So worsted is he at "the few fine locks
 "Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
 "Sun-blached the livelong summer,"—all that's left
 Of the Goito lay! And thus bereft,
 Sleep and forget, Sordello! In effect
 He sleeps, the feverish poet—I suspect
 Not utterly companionless; but, friends,
 Wake up! The ghost's gone, and the story ends
 I'd fain hope, sweetly; seeing, peri or ghoul,
 That spirits are conjectured fair or foul,
 Evil or good, judicious authors think,
 According as they vanish in a stink
 Or in a perfume. Friends, be frank! ye snuff
 Civet, I warrant. Really? Like enough!
 Merely the savour's rareness; any nose
 May ravage with impunity a rose:
 Rifle a musk-pod and 't will ache like yours!
 I'd tell you that same pungency ensures
 An after-gust, but that were overbold.
 Who would has heard Sordello's story told.